

WILLIAM BUTLER / MR. THREE



MR THREE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

The Experiment

The Butterfly Revolution

The House at Akiya

William Butler

MR THREE



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How much of hope is now removed from struggle,
 how much of heart from wit,
I do not know.
I only know I weep
 to see the orient dawn
 that yesterday exhilarated me.

To the memory of President John F. Kennedy

Chapter 1

1 A NEW MAN

M. M. MacNail eyed the applicant carefully.

The applicant tried to respond with some of MacNail's directness, but the exercise was considerably more of an experience for the applicant, who was required to give the whole sum of his intellectual energy (which, had it been more than a slight bit of mathematics, would have prohibited him from this meeting), into searching for the eyes which were eyeing him. It was not only that the candle-quivering room was dim; it was that all of the Director's features seemed on the verge of absorption by a variety of facial folds and wrinkles, which themselves were the result of years of intense practice at the adoption of each subtle emotion and its neighbouring Emotions-Systems, as the Director called them. For, to M. M. MacNail, the first asset of the secret agent was his ability to dissimulate, and MacNail held himself to be the greatest dissimulator of all, he who could manipulate his face through the gentle undulations and volcanic contortions of seventy-three emotions (or sub-emotions from neighbouring Emotions-Systems) in the space of sixty seconds. He claimed it was a record. Even if it were, it was no longer possible to determine whether MacNail's claim was precise; for his face had, after years of such exercises, acquired the capacity of altering its mood quite separately from the rest of MacNail, and there were times when it underwent performances which were grand and tragic while MacNail himself might casually have been asking for toast or a fresh candle, witless of the drama before him, always in its third act, which lent such simple requests a dark and terrible majesty.

'What are you staring at?' MacNail demanded of the applicant, suddenly.

The applicant had just made sure he had discovered MacNail's right eye and was proceeding to gaze into it with the unblinking directness with which it gazed out at him; but now that spot upon the ocean suddenly disappeared beneath the MacNailian surface.

'Why were you staring at my wart?' asked MacNail. 'Haven't you seen a wart before?'

The applicant shuddered and tried to make a smile. 'Sorry, Sir.'

'I expect you took it for my eye.'

'Your eye, Sir?' The applicant swept his glance desperately over MacNail's face.

'Pebble, do you wonder why it's dark in here?' asked the Director. 'I'll tell you something: I see in the dark. I'm a rat. Strike that. I'm a cat. I prefer candlelight. It's cheaper. In the direct light of day, people can't hear. They look for my mouth, thinking my voice is something to see. They can't find it. So they can't hear me. In the dark, they don't look for my mouth. I speak distinctly in the dark. Am I speaking distinctly, Pebble?'

'Very distinctly indeed, Sir,' answered Pebble.

'Just so,' said MacNail. 'They can't find my mouth. They've got warts where their eyes should be. They aren't prepared for intellectual faces; my face thinks for itself. Do I look happy?'

'I should say so, Sir,' said the applicant, though he couldn't just then put the folds and features of MacNail into any specific category, the only one actually occurring to him being *Simmering Wheat-Germ*.

'I can't tell,' said MacNail, 'not always. It gets ahead of me sometimes: I know I'm planning to be happy, so it takes aim on it. Or perhaps I know I *should* look happy, so it takes care of it for me. Maybe I look mad?'

'I don't think so, Sir.'

'I should look mad. I *am* mad. No matter. I was told good things about you, Pebble.'

'Yes, Sir.'

'You got remarkable grades in the examination. Quite remarkable.'

'Thank you, Sir.'

'You're rather an imbecile.'

'Yes, Sir.'

'But I don't trust you.'

'I see, Sir.'

'I'll tell you why I don't trust you. It's because I suspect you.'

'I wish you wouldn't, though,' Pebble slowly licked at his lips.

'I suspect everyone, Pebble.'

'Even if I didn't do it?' inquired Pebble, fingering his knees nervously.

'Didn't do what?'

Pebble's mouth distended and he began again to hunt for his interrogator's eyes, as if he might learn from them, if he could find them, whether he was the right man come to the right office which, with God's grace, he might not be.

'Didn't do what, Pebble?' MacNail made a short hard laugh. Pebble jumped and MacNail went on, 'Caught you that time. I suspect everyone, Pebble, because anyone may be.'

Pebble was about to ask, *Be what?* but sensed a trap. He said, 'I think I understand.'

The folds of what may have been MacNail's brow seemed to undergo a contortion which, though it suggested no particular emotion of itself, might centrifugally have been winding itself about a scowl. 'You don't think and you don't understand. That's the way I like my boys to be: eyes and mouths. See and report. Let it go at that. I think you don't understand, Pebble, and you wouldn't understand if I explained myself all night. Is it night? I can't always tell. If it's night, I'm hungry. Is it night?'

'It's mid-afternoon, Sir.'

'Well, anyone may be! You may be. Your mother may be. Do you have a mother, Pebble?'

'I had one, Sir.'

'Well, she may have been. Are you sure she wasn't?'

Pebble shook his head thoughtfully. 'I'm not sure.'

'You see?' MacNail's palm fell upon his desk. 'Even you

don't know; you, her own son. So why should I feel certain about you? I've investigated you. I know what you've done every day since you were born. But I don't read minds. How can I know about you?'

Pebble shook his head again. 'I don't even know about myself.'

'I think you're telling the truth.'

'I wonder,' mused Pebble.

'You're hired.'

'Sir?'

'There will be a meeting of my top agents in this office, tomorrow evening, eight o'clock. I'm inviting you, Pebble.'

'Thank you, Sir.'

'You're sure she's dead?'

'Yes, Sir.'

MacNail nodded, perhaps sorrowfully, though his wrinkles may have been wandering about only drowsily. 'Maybe it's better that way.'

'I wonder,' Pebble stared remorsefully down at his knees.

'Well,' MacNail picked up his head, trying a cheerful note in opposition to the lackadaisical woe in his face, 'I can't use her life as a threat against you.'

'A threat, Sir?' Pebble, too, looked up.

'Is your father alive?'

'I don't understand, Sir.'

'That's better, that's more like it. Tomorrow evening, eight o'clock. Don't just sit there, Pebble. Look busy.'

Pebble stood up and started to back off towards the door. 'Thank you, Sir. I'll be off to the dormitory, then. I'll see you tomorrow night,' and he forced a chuckle, 'Boss.' There was no response to that, so Pebble added more cautiously, 'God bless you, Sir.'

'God? God is it? I gave up on God. Eighteen months ago it was. Got sick and tired of it, damned sick of praying. I started out with Clara Bow and gave up at Pier Angeli. No, Sir, not one favour done me. I'm sceptical of God, my man. Look busy, Pebble.'

Pebble nodded jerkily and stumbled back out of the room.

2 S.E.A.

The organization of SEA (Secret Enemy Agency) was actually initiated during the Second World War, a few months before the dropping of the atomic bomb upon Hiroshima, when the threat of peace was imminent. In looking for a man to direct SEA, two qualities were held to be of paramount importance, the first of these being loyalty, the second being hardness. His loyalty would have to be a physically affirmed fact rather than a supposition supported by a collection of statistics, and he would have to be as hard as nails, said Senator Frank Priest, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Un-American Activities Abroad, who had been assigned the responsibility of locating and investigating men of the stature demanded by the SEA project.

It seemed by merest chance that the name of Magut MacLeach MacNail was submitted to Senator Priest who, though he had never heard of MacNail, liked his name. In launching an investigation of the man, Senator Priest learned that the President had never heard of MacNail, either. Nor had the Secretary of State, nor the Pentagon. Nor had the Secretary of the Treasury. Nor had the Washington Golf and Anglers Association. It took some days only to learn that MacNail had nominated himself, which created considerable consternation among the nation's leaders, inasmuch as the SEA project was a top-secret activity. Senator Priest was impressed, for if the man was as loyal as he claimed and as hard as his name, he was also encouragingly sneaky. The investigation of MacNail was widened and Senator Priest was enormously pleased at its results.

MacNail, it proved, had emerged from a wealthy Providence family, and was early considered a prodigy in the realm of finance for the fact that he had devised a *Business Psychology* which maintained as a basic premise that, 'Business is an art, a good businessman a great artist.' Furthermore, MacNail's *Business Psychology* had it as a tenet that the Inner Man was always involved with Business, with the Art of Making Money, and therefore that each man had the 'Business Spirit'. 'Money,'

wrote the young MacNail, 'does not grow on trees, nor is it in heaven. Money is within you.' Other tenets included the following :

- 1 Man is psychology and psychology is ego.
- 2 Great ego rises, common ego is stationary.
- 3 Common ego will sleep when fed well; ergo, the common ego is a pig.
- 4 Power is synonymous with the control of Pig Ego. True power is lasting. Lasting power is discreet. Discreet power is secret. Secret power is modest. Modest power humble, creating this paradox: the great ego appears as non-ego.
- 5 Pig Ego allows humility great latitude; ergo, subservience in nature is a dominant characteristic of the great ego and the true leader.
- 6 The use of concealed power within this great latitude gathers wider concealed power.
- 7 The secret to success, and the key to *Business Psychology*, is disguise, dissembling, false humility, concealment and self-knowledge.
- 8 Do unto others as you would have others do unto your competitors.

How precise a judge MacNail's *Business Psychology* was of the 'Business Spirit' cannot be certified, but certain it is that MacNail, in the use of these arts, fell into wealth in each direction he turned. He would have been famous had he not taken great care not to be. An example of the ambition which created this remorseless psychology is apparent even before the actual development of the privately-distributed pamphlet itself, in a conversation reported by a woman who had once been young MacNail's nurse. He was ten years old when he inquired of his father :

'How much, to the penny, are we really worth?'

'In the modern world,' replied his doting father, 'there is never a calculation to be made to the penny, for fortunes rise

and fall each day. 'Safely, however, we are worth fifty million dollars.'

'And what,' asked little Maguty, as he was called, 'will fifty million dollars buy?'

'Why, it will buy anything you want,' replied his father.

'Will it buy fifty-one million dollars?' asked the child.

His father was pleased with this dialogue and bound to confess that his own influence was limited so long as there was another fortune still greater than his own. At once the boy began to contemplate the psychology of business, and in a moment or two he announced that he had just formed two purposes in life: the first was to gather about him the greatest of wealths, the second to achieve the greatest power. The second purpose would be nourished by the first, while the first would be sustained by the second. The methods by which he meant to gain his wealth were twofold: the initial procedures were those he later wrote into his *Psychology*, the secondary procedures being those involved in the destruction of all accumulations of wealth threatening the prestige of his own. His father laughed and clapped his son upon the back and said:

'You'll have to destroy your own father, then, won't you?'

'But it will take a good five years,' speculated the son.

His father was thoughtful briefly, then smiled and said, 'I hope you're able to raise your initial capital.'

The young MacNail was an exemplary economizer, from the time he was ten (when his father put him on a strict allowance, obliging him to budget even his meals). He was an eater of bread and raisins, a drinker of water, a student by candle, which he snuffed out when he dropped into meditation. It was by candlelight and with a small mirror upon his desk that MacNail worked at that extension of *Business Psychology* which he referred to as *Motor and Emotions Systems*, a perfect understanding of which, he claimed, was essential to any man seeking power through wealth. To him, it was vital to express exactly what might be the most profitable expression at any given moment, and especially to master the facial expressions in the Humility System (no easy task, for it was an intricate

system with many sub-emotions-systems, such as Pathos, Bathos, Abjection, Fawning, Fear, Defeat, Surrender, etc.) He kept Shakespeare, Dickens, Tolstoy beside his Adam Smith, Marquis de Sade and *Arabian Nights* to have constant reference to the characters therein, with their incalculable range of human emotion and expression. He would take a single play, such as *King Lear*, and pantomime his way through its massive pretence until his secretary, the only witness to these nocturnal labours, could instantly guess not only which character MacNail indicated, but could at the first flicker of the candle name the scene and line as well. No one looking at MacNail would have denied he was a self-made man and he had claimed, before he was twenty, that he could make a million dollars without uttering a word.

From his first capital (which was loaned to him by a good friend of his father who was, unfortunately for his father, in a similar competitive business), MacNail lifted his fortune from a scant hundred thousand dollars into the millions, then into the hundreds of millions, absorbing men and corporations (his father included) along the way.

'The man's hard,' said Senator Frank Priest, studying these facts, 'and he translates secrecy into power, and,' for though he was the wealthiest individual in the country, not even the Secretary of the Treasury had heard of him, 'he's sneaky as all get-out.' He was clearly ideal for the situation of Director of SEA, and gained the full support of Senator Priest, who arranged for MacNail an audience with the President of the United States. The President, himself, worried about MacNail's loyalty.

'Why not,' MacNail impatiently asked the President, 'take my Aunt and hold her for a surety?'

The President said it perhaps wasn't necessary, seeing that MacNail's fortune and the nation's future might be protected by the same means; since, after all, MacNail owned so much of the country. But then the President asked MacNail why he wanted to be Director of SEA to begin with.

'Power,' retorted MacNail at once.

'I think,' chuckled the President, casting about curiously

after MacNail's eyes, 'you would like to be President.'

'The Presidency is not concealed,' snapped MacNail. 'Power is.'

The President chuckled again, but then thought about it and began to feel uncomfortable. As if looking for MacNail's meaning in his eyes, and therefore suddenly needing his eyes more seriously than before, he again began to peruse MacNail's face, and nervously toyed with his Great Seal, which he dropped and it caught at and authorized the paper at the top of those within a certain folder upon the President's desk, and that abruptly and unexpectedly did M. M. MacNail become Director of the Secret Enemy Agency.

'I'll be at SEA in the morning,' said MacNail, standing up.

'So will I,' muttered the President of the United States, trying to extricate the Great Seal from the fates it had sealed.

3 THE LURE

The SEA idea worked.

Furthermore, it was efficient. and any secret Congressional investigation of its costs more than satisfied the investigators that the operation was viable, and that M. M. MacNail was a man who knew how to do a large job by candlelight. MacNail himself described his method to investigators from Congress in a way which at once terrified, overwhelmed and awed them.

'I use saturation,' said MacNail. 'Secret enemies, to put it more simply, are cheaper by the dozen. If I know that one man in fifteen is guilty, I put the finger on all fifteen. Arresting fifteen men in one day is cheaper than arresting one man in fifteen days. It's interesting to note that there is always something to arrest a man for. I don't have trouble with it. Sometimes, in fact, when I've found out my one man in fifteen, I'm half convinced the other fourteen are more dangerous,' and MacNail would outline his saturation policy until he had explained that, in the course of a mere few years, SEA had been responsible for the apprehension of a hundred and fifty

thousand individuals who, according to MacNail, had until then never been suspected of anything at all; and in all those years, SEA suffered only one embarrassment, which was the apparent defection of a certain Agent Blister to Moscow and to Comrade I. B. Bulsh't's dread Secret Soviet Spy and Anti-Graft League; and even this one embarrassment was not positive, since all that was known was that Agent Blister had vanished not quite three years before. Against this, MacNail offered endless evidence of his successes, and once created a spectacle which served as instant confirmation of his alertness and SEA's breadth of investigatory principles when, as a group of seven Congressmen stood up from their chairs to leave, MacNail shook the hand of each but held on to the hand of the seventh man, a New York representative and oftime opponent of Senator Priest, and said, 'Congressman Bullet, you're under arrest.'

The Congressman tried vigorously to avow his innocence, but his guilt became probable (probability being synonymous in SEA with liability) when it turned out that Bullet was unable to as much as give a hint of how he was innocent. The six remaining Congressmen congratulated MacNail, tipped their hats to Congressman Bullet and fled.

Since that time, at least seventy-five thousand additional liabilities had been reeled in to wait swimming within SEA saturation until their innocence should be untangled, at which time they could be confidently turned over to the more public offices of the Justice Department. And the only complaint which had ever been formed against MacNail's SEA was that, in all of those thousands of cases, he had not yet apprehended, much less prosecuted, one foreign agent from a foreign power. There was some anxiety in Washington over this, since the SEA secret could not be kept indefinitely, and when the hour came that the operation had to be made at least somewhat public, it would be helpful to show that SEA had saved the nation from something or, at least, someone.

That anxiety grew so deep that Senator Priest finally sent the following three-part memo to M. M. MacNail:

To: *Director, SEA.*

From: *Chairman, Senate Committee on Un-American Activities Abroad*

Subject: *Elusive Foreign Agents*

1 *Hello there, Friend MacNail!*

2 *The SEA is doing it hard! Well done!*

3 *All arrested so far have been from New York State and Rhode Island.*

The irony of the Senator's taciturn memo did not miss MacNail, for in the memo was implied a direct criticism of MacNail's methods; and, more seriously, it also implied that MacNail might do well to alter those methods by the use of an agent of the calibre of the notorious Mr. Three—Black Magic—that man or genie who walked the streets of white nations with impunity, he, an African more difficult to locate than his own shadow. Senator Priest's implication that MacNail rely upon a man of the reputed quick intelligence of Mr. Three was a stern appraisal of MacNail's own insistence that each of his SEA investigators boast an Intelligence Quotient no greater than that of a moron, for, as MacNail liked to say, 'Ignorance is loyalty. Unquestioning imbecility is unquestionable patriotism.' MacNail was certain of the Senator's implication, for the memo made a single point in three statements, and the number *three* could only be a reference to the code name Black Magic had used in America for some years, Mr. Three, when he had worked so adroitly that SEA had not even been able to determine the nation that employed him, though MacNail had no doubt that his employer was I. B. Bulsht himself. During his years in America, there had been reference after reference to the activities of the man, but never a clue to his whereabouts until it was finally learned that he had returned to his native Africa, where he was worshipped as Black Magic by more than one people, who believed him a god and magician. So wondrous were the tales told of him, so clever at concealment and dissembling was he, that MacNail, who privately believed the man had somehow got hold of an old

copy of his *Business Psychology* and mastered it, could not restrain himself from feeling a certain affection for the African.

MacNail read the Senator's memo and read it again and turned it upside down and inspected it from various angles, but he could find in it no significance whatsoever except for its three points, and he cursed and allowed his face to consort with a number of emotions in the Rage Class, spending just a little energy upon the *Humiliation Subgrouping-A* (*Weltschmerz*), before he quietened down and resolved that the entire SEA operation would surrender itself to the single task of locating Mr. Three, and not only locating him, but making a SEA agent of him as much along MacNailian lines as possible.

'It means integration,' MacNail announced to his face, which was having none of it, 'but I won't be criticized.'

Thus had he called the special meeting of his top agents, to which he had invited the new man, Agent Pebble, whose fresh imbecility pleased him. For he had hit upon and initiated a plan which, if costly, he believed was brilliant.

As that meeting began, MacNail pulled fast the dark curtains, lit a fresh and festive candle and turned slowly upon the group of men standing before his desk, all of them about the same size, all of them impeccably if not richly attired in light suits, all of them with their hands behind their backs and feet slightly spread, all of them with their eyes attentively upon the Director.

MacNail clenched his fists and accidentally smiled, then sang, 'I want Three,' following the song with a carol of hisses as his face marvelled, retreated coyly, opened aghast. He grinned infectiously, wearily, soothingly, gave it a prankish turn and then transformed it into sheer ornament; he poured out a cadaverous sigh, followed by a slight bit of an exhalation suggesting the bewonderment of a child and, in a moment, one nearly saw his eyes through a sorrowful glance which might have belonged to a youth in heat. These eyes became slightly more apparent yet, yes, they were eyes and they were there (Pebble shuddered) and they were eyeing the men savagely, coquettishly, timorously; next a moment of indifference capped by triumph, ingratiation, and ultimately MacNail (as if he had

been seeking this all along) pulled intimidation out of his facial bag and passed its colours about for all to see.

To this artistry the men in the room responded with the loss of their own colours, and audible sighs nearly as intense as their Director's.

'I have here,' said MacNail, compounding purple guilt and white chivalry with the blackest treachery, coming out with something the colour of a bruise, and menacing, 'a memo from the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Un-American Activities Abroad, who also happens to be Chairman of the Senate American Image Committee. He wants Three, gentlemen. *He* wants Three. *I* want Three. *We* want Three. Am I understood? All who understand me, raise your hands.'

From the group of twelve men thirteen hands were instantly lifted, the new agent having lifted both of his in the hope that MacNail would absolve him of any complicity that might pertain to whatever was the matter.

MacNail chuckled wistfully and quickly brought it into gleefulness. 'Why, you're afraid of me, aren't you? Afraid of me, Pebble?'

'With all my heart,' Pebble responded without delay.

'Afraid of me, Templeback?'

'Right,' Templeback chuckled boyishly.

'Afraid of me, Simper?'

'To a turn, Sir,' Simper tried to smile.

'You're all afraid of me. It's better that way.' MacNail thrust his hands behind his back and surveyed his men. 'Hands down, Pebble. Shall I tell you why it's better that way? Why is it better that way, Pebble?'

'Does it warm your heart?' asked Pebble, who felt his legs wobbling.

After thirteen quick smiles from the Disdain Class, MacNail sneered, more or less, and said, 'Nothing warms my heart, Pebble. Nothing. Can you warm an iceberg, Pebble?'

'I believe you could freeze fire,' Pebble answered unevenly.

'Wit? Was it wit?' MacNail clapped his hands together, a little abjectly. 'I love wit; wit is delicious. We eat wit here, Pebble. Will Pebble make a good supper, Templeback?'

'Tasty,' Templeback sounded uncertain.

'Simper, why is it wise to be afraid of me?'

'Would my life be at stake?' inquired Simper.

'Is that right, Falkshound?'

'I agree with you entirely, Director MacNail,' answered Falkshound, his emphatic stiff articulation suggesting his speech had been carefully memorized beforehand.

'Is that right, Gorman?' asked MacNail.

'Only partly,' said Gorman. 'It's true our lives are at stake, but a wise child knows its own parent.'

'Gorman is clever,' MacNail clapped his hands again, producing a sound not unrelated to *Merriment-C* (*Chuckles*). 'Gorman is clever. A wise child knows its own parent. Gorman meant to tell you that it's wise to fear me because I possess you. Is that right, Gorman?'

'Right,' said Gorman, coming to a posture of military attention.

'Right,' said Templeback.

'What is right?' MacNail turned on Templeback.

'Gorman,' said Templeback.

'Gorman is right?' asked MacNail.

Templeback swallowed and whispered, 'Right.'

'A wise child,' said MacNail, 'speaks when he is spoken to. Right, Templeback?'

'Straight ahead,' blinked Templeback.

'You must be a dumb child.'

'Mum's the word,' murmured Templeback.

'Gorman,' MacNail looked again upon the clever agent, 'fry Templeback in garlic sauce. Eat him for breakfast and you won't have to eat lunch. Why is that, Gorman?'

'Because,' said Gorman, at attention, 'he'll have eaten Agent Pebble for supper and I'll be eating two meals at once.'

'You see how clever Gorman is?' said MacNail, his face gloating and bloating. 'Gorman is alert. Gorman must be studying. Gorman misses nothing but Three. Why did you miss Three when he was in New York, Gorman?'

Gorman, at attention, bit his lips. 'It was my day off, Sir.'

'There's a cure for that, Sir,' hissed MacNail.

'Right,' said Gorman, at attention.

'Right,' said Templeback.

'Shut up,' said Gorman, unmoving.

'Mum's the word,' said Templeback.

'Men,' said MacNail, 'I have good news for you. Mr. Three is coming to New York. One of you will bring him to me. That man will receive a bonus. What do you suppose that bonus will be, Simper?'

'Pebble?' inquired Simper.

'Transfer?' asked Pebble.

'Reprieve?' suggested Gorman.

'Right!' cried MacNail, stirring numerous scowls into the discoloured batter of his face and blinking several folds of this sinister omelette at Gorman. 'Gorman is shrewd. Gorman, you must go to night school. Why reprieve, Gorman?'

'Because,' said Gorman, at attention, 'it means you've condemned us, but the one to bring in Mr. Three is reprieved.'

'Oh, Gorman is good at riddles,' MacNail's voice was ecstatic even as his face seemed to fall asleep. 'Gorman knows a thing when it's hinted at and has the courage to say so. Gorman, you're fired. Reichstooop, Bernhard! Take Gorman out!'

'Right,' mumbled Templeback.

'Take him out,' MacNail clapped his hands, and Agents Reichstooop and Bernhard leaped upon the startled Gorman and dragged him quickly from the room. In only a few minutes they had returned to join the others as MacNail, whose face twitched as if coming awake again, said, 'Perhaps there are others here inclined to exhibit some cleverness for me. I hope not. Keep your emotions up and your wits down, that's what I say. Remember that, Falkshound. Remember that Pebble. Be like Templeback. He doesn't talk too much. For Templeback, agreement is enough.'

'Right,' murmured Pebble.

'As for Gorman,' said MacNail, 'a man as shrewd as that is liable to discover ambition. I don't tolerate ambition. Do I tolerate ambition, Bernhard?'

'Ambition is reserved for the father,' said Bernhard. 'Let the children stay obedient.'

'That answer leans, Bernhard,' MacNail said thoughtfully. 'It leans on cleverness.'

'Did it?' and Bernhard cleared his throat carefully and put his hands behind his back. 'Actually, I didn't understand the question.'

'Mum's the word,' said Templeback.

'Three!' exclaimed MacNail. 'That's the word, that's the number, that's the name, that's the bonus. Where is he? Do any of you know? Reichstoop? What about it, Reichstoop?'

Reichstoop tried to grin and he shrugged his great shoulders. 'Denver?'

'If you weren't an idiot, Reichstoop, you'd go right back to the war trials. Where is Three, Pebble?'

Pebble took in his breath and whispered, 'Right.'

'Everywhere?' hazarded Simper.

'Wonderful!' wheezed MacNail, filling his face with the rainbow, giving him the all-over appearance of a chameleon hovering upon a withering tree. 'I think I'll call that a joke, Simper.' The rainbow curdled. 'Perhaps you think it's all a joke? Perhaps I'm joking about wanting Three? Am I joking, Templeback?'

Templeback was at a loss for a word.

'Am I joking, Pebble?'

'If you are,' Pebble's voice was small, 'it's not funny.'

'Am I joking, Falkshound?'

'It would set a precedent,' said Falkshound.

'I'm not joking,' said MacNail, shaking a jowl at Falkshound. He managed to draw a number of hues from *Pure Disgust (Ugh, 2-B)* and these he distributed about somewhat cubistically. 'It doesn't matter where Three is. What matters is that he will be here. How do I know? I'll tell you how. I sent him a letter. Well, I see your astonishment. It was not, however, difficult, even though it was costly, damned costly. Had to write to every secret service agency in the world. The letter was bound to get to him. I asked him to be here and he'll be here, giving me seven days to find terms to suit him. I don't

know how he will come or exactly when, but he will be in New York, and soon. Men, I want Three. I want him even if he changes his mind about seeing me. I want him even if he doesn't come. If he dies, I want his corpse. You'll have seven days to appease an appetite insatiable but in the digestion of Three's soul. I have a letter which I believe is authentic, and it is signed *Three*, and the writer of that letter will be among us. Perhaps the seven days have begun already. Perhaps they will begin tomorrow. Perhaps he will postpone his visit and your lives, who can say?'

Reichstoop shook his head in open admiration. 'Director MacNail,' he said, 'you are a genius.'

'That's not for you to decide, and I remark that as an original observation, Reichstoop,' MacNail may have been eyeing him threateningly. 'Take care. If you wonder what it is, now, that brings this enemy to my door, I will tell you. I offered him that which brings any man to any door. Money and power. I didn't say how much or how little, but by God, he'll talk.'

Reichstoop's eyes dilated and he said, 'You've got *kultur*,' before he could stop himself, and then he bit at his lips and gazed at the rug.

'Reichstoop,' hissed MacNail, shoving his hands into his pockets, 'that letter from Three . . .'

'Sir?'

'It was postmarked Denver.'

Reichstoop's eyes widened and he turned beseechingly upon the agents beside him, as if they should step over to stand beside him and assure MacNail that a man with Reichstoop's low intelligence could never have broached the truth except through error and coincidence.

'Take care, Reichstoop,' repeated MacNail. 'In this case, I'm perfectly aware that a man as astute and brilliant as Three would have a reply sent to me from any city where either he or his confederates might be located. But one day, Reichstoop, your idiocy will lead you into a guess altogether too fortuitous. Tell me what you see, not what you think. What time is it, Falkshound?'

'Eight-forty,' said Falkshound, coming to attention.

'Get away from me, all of you. One day, soon, he will appear. Seven days later, *poof!* Divide yourselves through the city. Be eyes. See everything. Doubt everything. Everyone you see is guilty, everything you see is a plot. Saturation, gentlemen, saturation. Now get out, get out, the last one out is a parsnip for peeling. Pebble, put your hands down!'

'I'll get it done directly, Sir' murmured the stiffened Peeble.

MacNail moved swiftly towards the door, twitched or perhaps winked his right eye at Templeback and nudged him as he passed.

'Right,' whispered Templeback.

1 A QUARREL

It seems now years ago—in reality, it was not so long ago—that I sat in the Government House in Albertville, speaking as the leader of my party, the Badosh-Africa People's Independent All-Tribes Labour Party (BAPIATLP), demanding independence of the skinny white man with the narrow moustache and narrow eyes. It was all the politics I knew: to demand. And so I demanded.

'M. Rodriq,' I must have said a thousand times over, 'do not oblige us to take our independence. Give it to us. It is our country. You are intruders here.'

'M. Adumbaba,' M. Rodriq must have answered a thousand times, 'you are disinherit the way of the world. Badosh has belonged to my country for half a thousand years, and the economy of my country today rests squarely upon the shoulders of Badosh. Therefore, be strong. Consent to our terms and convince your colleagues that Commonwealth status for Badosh serves all of us the best.'

'No, no,' I would then say, 'for your concept of a Commonwealth of nations seems to us but a confederation of colonies, and my people do not wish to be the subjects of your Sovereign.'

'M. Adumbaba,' M. Rodriq would laugh, throwing up his hands, 'my own people often say they do not wish to be the subjects of my Sovereign. And yet, the way of the world is the way of the world. Many are the children who despise the loving parent.'

This is how it went a thousand times over, for a month, for two months, for three months. My demands were emptied of patience, and I of reason. M. Rodriq represented a Government whose greatest strength was constancy. What would

evolution be did Nature respect the *status quo* as ardently as did the Government of M. Rodriq?

I do not wish to be misunderstood. I did not demand independence out of Badoshian contempt for M. Rodriq, for his people or for his Monarch. Oh, yes, we had been enslaved, badly treated, at times starved, made homeless in our own homeland, but if I am not always clever with myself, I have tried at least to be honest with myself; and history is not books and my own people have been guilty of sins of similar magnitude in the past, if on a slighter scale. M. Rodriq's people are also human, and for their attitudes and acts we Badoshians could forgive them; but to permit them to endure, we could not.

'M. Rodriq,' I said, 'you demand war.'

'I demand peace,' insisted the High Commissioner for Badosh.

'M. Rodriq,' I said, 'we cry independence, or we cry war.'

'I demand order,' retorted he. 'My Sovereign demands order.'

'To your Sovereign, then the petition of my people is an empty envelope?'

'Badosh is a part of my country, and my country has Law. M. Adumbaba, I demand that you recognize the vital importance of the institution of Law.'

'Now, we mean to make our own laws!' said I, angrily.

'I demand peace,' insisted Commissioner Rodriq.

'M. Rodriq, hear me, for we cry independence or we cry war.'

'I demand order!'

'I demand independence!'

'Order! Order first, and then the independence which comes naturally from attaining the rights and prerogatives of all Commonwealth nations.'

'Independence! Now, that is our birthright!'

'Order!'

'Independence or war!'

'Order or arrest!'

'War!'

'Arrest him!' shrieked M. Rodriq. 'Arrest this man!'

This is how I came to be placed under house arrest.

As leader of my party and, by petition, rightful Premier of all Badosh, from Albertville to Maosville, I could remain in my Albertville house and there receive visitors. But I could no longer leave the house even to walk about the garden.

2 POLITICS

My people were agonized by my arrest. Especially, the people of Albertville rose angry, lying for white soldiers in the bush. Two white soldiers were slain directly inside the city. Albertville was declared under martial law, and soon soldiers were shooting my people. Terrible reprisals were threatened, but could not the fools realize that this only served to make my people angrier?

About all of these things, there was nothing I could do without betraying the people. It was a situation of this sort: that for me to take up the pen in agreement with M. Rodriq was at once to save some lives and sacrifice the nation of them. I received reports from my dear friend, Lumla, who now acted outside my house as leader of our party. But I could do nothing for my people or my party now, except to offer up tributes of tears.

One day, M. Rodriq came to me and, lighting a cigar, he said, 'I am sent by my Sovereign to tell you we shall recognize your right to the high office of Premier if you will recognize that Badosh must remain within the Commonwealth of nations so beneficially ruled by my Sovereign.'

'And what is this, Sir?' I asked him. 'Last year's newspaper?'

Why, no,' smiled M. Rodriq, 'for I am now empowered to say to you as well that, if you will not agree to this position, we will find a Premier who will do so gladly.'

'There is only one Premier. I am appointed by my party, the elected governors of my people, whose petition is the foundation of that appointment.'

'There is another party today,' Commissioner Rodriq told

me, still smiling, and he sat beside me upon my sofa, crossing his legs, not looking upon me.

'What party is this? Do you mean Tebrou and the GTCT?'

'I mean the Badosh-African Tribes and Peoples' Independent Commonwealth Party.

'The what?'

'The BATPICP.'

'I have never heard of such a party.'

'Nor has anyone else. But they will hear of it soon. After all, Badoshians are weary of this interminable threat of bloodshed. They want to work for their future.'

'Their future, I tell you, Sir, is in independence!'

'Adumbaba, Adumbaba,' sighed M. Rodriq, shaking his head at me. 'You are not an educated man. You are a simple man, a man of your people. This is why my Sovereign loves you. You should not, however, pretend that you keep in your brain all the answers to the questions your heart asks. We have had development, we are sophisticated; we will share these assets with you, we will help your people, through you, and perhaps — do you understand, Adumbaba? — perhaps, through you, we will be able to see more that we can do to help your people. Or,' and here he drew from his pocket a document of some sort and slowly unfolded it, 'perhaps we can do this through another. Truly, it scarcely matters to us. Sign here, please . . . Premier Adumbaba,' and now he handed to me his opened fountain pen.

Even a glance at the document permitted me to see how it ordained the destruction of the BAPIATLP and the creation of the BATPICP, making me a leader not of a people's party but of a Commonwealth party, a veritable member of a foreign monarch's embassy. I say, I would have aligned myself with the GTCT first; I would have joined my strength to that of Vusupu in Maosville first.

'Well, and I see the game of politics you play,' I said, giving that paper back to him.

'Why, not? I have made it plain enough. And so, Adumbaba, you don't sign?'

'No,' I turned from him, 'I think not.'

M. Rodriq shrugged and, as slowly as he had unfolded it, he now refolded the document. 'You do not understand the way of the world, Adumbaba.'

I was sad when that man had gone from me. I had had my ignorance hurled into my face. I had dared to suspect I might be a political man, but no wise one; I had tried to measure myself in that way, and yet he had swiftly measured me as a simple man who knew nothing at all.

That evening, I had a conversation with my friend, Lumla, saying softly to him, 'Lumla, Lumla,' holding my hands together in my lap as I sat back in a straight and hard chair, keeping my eyes closed. 'I have told you all that has happened, but now let me tell you one thing more. I mean to resign as leader of the BAPIATLP.'

Lumla seemed genuinely upset, that lovely friend held to his chair and said, 'Adumbaba is needed.'

I shook my head. 'Adumbaba is ignorant, knowing less every day. Lumla, lead the people.'

'The people love you. In a world of indignity, you spoke to them of their dignity. In a world of dependence, you spoke to them of courage. In a world of ugliness, you spoke to them of beauty.'

'Ah,' I smiled, leaving my eyes closed, 'Love. Beauty. Dignity. And who speaks to them in a world of bullets and hunger? Love and beauty are not politics, Lumla.'

'And what is politics?'

'Politics is the way of the world. Love is only the way of the heart.'

'Yet, once you said,' I was reminded by this good friend, M. Lumla, 'that politics, if it will live, needs a heart. Adumbaba, do you resign from the people? Now? With the war slung low and ready to fall like a storm?'

I opened my eyes. 'I am no man to lead this nation if there is to be a war. Do not try to make me think so, Lumla. I know better. A harder head is needed. Oh, Lumla, don't you see that I am already a prisoner of the war?'

'Don't you know, Adumbaba? Don't you know? Even though you are a prisoner, they follow you today. Don't you

know, Adumbaba, why Rodriq brought you a paper to sign? Don't you know they are afraid of you? Already their soldiers die because Adumbaba has no freedom.'

Why, I knew that people died; but, gods, they were my people as well as M. Rodriq's people! I couldn't think what to do. 'Lumla, perhaps you will explain to me what they want and how I may counter them. Tell me what to do.'

M. Lumla drew his chair closer to mine, his head down, thoughtfully, and then he glanced off at one of the white soldiers we could see through the glass doors leading to the hall. He touched my knee. 'Listen, Adumbaba.'

'What is it?'

'Sign the paper.'

I was astounded.

For a moment, I was even frightened. For a moment, I did not recognize Stajo Lumla.

'What are you telling me?' I asked.

'Sign the paper. Agree to their terms.'

'Lumla, I will not do that. Would you have me become the useless black figurehead of their white party? Don't you see what it means to the people?'

'Sign it, Adumbaba, and live. You will live to be free, to disavow that signature. Then you must leave the country. This is what we have decided.'

'You mean I should sign it and then disclaim it?'

'It is wisest, Adumbaba.'

'Why, it is a plain lie. Who will trust me after that?'

'I think the people will believe Adumbaba, and not Rodriq.'

'There will be my signature.'

'A signature means nothing at war.'

'But my friend—'

'No, you need not remember signing such a document.'

'It is deceit!'

'And if deceit saves lives? Yes, and your own?'

I stared at him. 'You believe this?'

'It is our hope, Adumbaba. Then you must leave the country.'

'Why? Where will I go?'

'We will talk to you when all is ready, and beg you to support our plan. But first, please sign the paper. Send for M. Rodriq, tell him you agree to his terms.'

'And he will trust me?'

'Surely. Because I, Lumla, will go to him and tell him this: if Adumbaba will not lead the people away from war under the party of the Commonwealth, then his Sovereign may depend upon Lumla to do that thing. They will rather sign with you than with me, for they seek not to martyr you, and they will fear that the death of Adumbaba might dangerously divide Tebrou from Vusupu, Albertville from Maosville. They will rather free you.'

I thought about all he had said, and told him frankly, 'Lumla, I do not understand these things.'

'What is it you do not understand?'

But I couldn't say what it was, for it was everything.

At last I closed my eyes again and said, 'Lumla, Lumla.'

'Yes, Adumbaba?'

'Now, this is true politics? And by these acts, we may correct those errors I made while acting more honestly?'

'This is politics, Adumbaba.'

'I do not like politics!' said I, angry.

3 THE PLAN

I waited, and spent the hours trying to think how it was I had originally come into leadership of my party. I, better than others, knew my weakness, and feared it; and yet, when people depend upon a man, he dares not discourage them by speaking much of his own weakness.

Yes, I knew my people depended upon me for independence. Moreover, I knew they were hungry, bitter, wanting recognition and the dignity of their own mastery, wanting education that was not only of crying empty babies, of humiliation, of labour, of fury. But what antidote to such poisons had I offered these black people? Why, I shouted their beauty, I shouted love, I shouted their dignity and told them that dignity

deserved self-possession. I shouted independence or war, I shouted their defiance. I shouted. And for my shouting I was made their leader. But when I entered into a room where men spoke and did not shout, I became a fool faced with sophisticated politics; confronted by the developed and potent politician, such as M. Rodriq, my shouting was laughable. A sane man may look upon the woe, the blood, the grim silence, the seething silence of his people, and be driven to shout. And the people say, 'Yes. Lead us.' And the man goes shouting before the world. But the courts of the world do not know my people's woe, they have not seen my people's blood, they do not understand the grim silence, they do not know what seethes there beneath that silence; they only hear a man shout, and call him uncivilized, and call him fool, and will not listen. In the West, they listen to Tebrou; yes, for he has visited those nations, even studied in one of their universities. Across the world, they hear Vusupu, for he speaks the clichés they recognize. But woe is without a voice among civilized men. Rather, they will watch us resort to war, and call us uncivilised, and say, 'Give Africa another hundred years under the wheel.' And when this happens, M. Rodriq, call a thousand men, 'Fool!' for, then, there will be a thousand shouters!

I did not have to send for M. Rodriq. He came to me, and again he had his document.

M. Rodriq told me that my friend and the Secretary of my party, M. Stajo Lumla, was prepared to assume leadership of the new Commonwealth Party if I would not do so, in order to prevent more bloodshed in Badosh. Moreover, M. Rodriq told me that Lumla would outlaw the old party once he had full control of the new, and the people would soon enough understand his wisdom and follow him in hope, whereupon I could expect to become nothing but the poor end of jokes made by those who once admired me: 'Adumbaba,' they might say, 'is he who leads the non-existent party of no members.'

How angry I became when Commissioner Rodriq told me these things. Truly, I feigned anger so that for a time I was not sure that I did not express a real bitterness against dear

Lumla; but soon I realized that I was so unhappy and uncertain that, in my play at anger, I was in truth ridding myself of many true and dreadful emotions.

'Lumla, Lumla!' I cried. 'Traitor! Deceitful, disloyal traitor! Robber! Murderer,' and I snatched that document from M. Rodriq's hands and grabbed at his fountain pen and I signed quickly, pushing the document back at him.

M. Rodriq examined the document; oh, he grinned like a baby at the rewarding breast and milk of a stranger's mother, and he folded the document and returned it to his inner pocket.

'Premier Adumbaba,' he said, 'the people will learn of your enthusiasm for peace. You have the pledge of our Sovereign, your Sovereign and mine, that we will work with you in producing a plan for the improvement of conditions in Badosh. We are now partners in the future of Europe and Africa.'

'I want schools!' and now I was again a shouter, speaking as if I believed in the document I had just signed, for I feared it. 'I want hospitals, houses. I want a workers-controlled union. Bring us your scholars, take home your missionaries! Bring us your doctors, take home your businessmen! Did you not hear of the five year old boy who, perhaps two months ago, died of a heart attack like a man of fifty? Why, he had worked too hard for your Sovereign, it seems, and your businessmen had not the skill of doctors to help him. Give us life and give us hope. This is my first message to your Sovereign. You hear what I want!'

'Go slowly, Premier Adumbaba,' smiled M. Rodriq. 'These things will surely come in time.'

And he bowed—ah, he bowed to me!—and left me, and took with him his soldiers, and with such a conversation did I enter into the mechanics of politics. Politics and deceit now dined at my heart, and from there I bled the blood of sadness.

That night I was visited by M. Lumla, carrying a thin portfolio, and seven other leaders of my party. They filed into my parlour and took seats, all so silently and impassively that it seemed as if they had come to witness my funeral and not my freedom, nor to put any scheme into operation. They arrived

just past supper, whereas the meeting to which they were formally invited was not scheduled to begin for another two hours, that meeting which had been arranged not by myself but by M. Rodriq, who would himself, with members of his staff, attend; the meeting which would demolish the party of my people and formally inaugurate the party of the Badoshian Commonwealth.

In silence we sat briefly, and M. Lumla it was who spoke first.

'We have not much time. Adumbaba, I told you that you must leave the country. Things have happened quickly. Are you prepared?'

'Do you mean at once?'

'I mean at once. Your signature has compressed time and we must stay ahead of events. Are you prepared?'

'What must I do?' I asked softly. 'Where must I go?'

'You are going to New York City, in America.'

Can you imagine my astonishment? 'New York!' I called out.

'You are going to see the Secretary-General of the United Nations, to whom you will carry the petition of our people for independence.' He lifted that portfolio. 'No man can carry it with your strength, Adumbaba.'

'Oh, it is impossible,' I said. 'M. Rodriq's soldiers will never let me go.'

'In a half hour you will be gone,' replied M. Lumla. 'A man comes soon to take you.'

'To New York City?'

'To Tunis; thence to London; thence to New York City.'

'Is it true?'

M. Lumla and the other members of my party looked upon me and suggested smiles, but I saw they were sad and frightened. I looked at them and asked, 'Is it true?'

I saw that it was true.

'But how is it possible?' I asked of them. 'My face is known. Who can take me safely from Albertville?'

Here, M. Lumla set his chin out and leaned closer to me. 'It is the man, *Black Magic*.'

Of course I knew of that man. Who did not? He had many names, that man, and many faces. Some called him *The Beast*, or *Six-Six-Six*, or *Three Sixes*, and he was well known by the name, *M. Three*; but by whatever name, the people feared him, through hate and through love, for many believe those names belonged to a god. To me, they belonged to some educated black man of some black country who knew how to make profit in dinars, in pounds, in rubles, in dollars, in each kind of currency; who had no scruples except those which opened his purse. It was said that *M. Three*, or *Black Magic*, was he who set the Mau Mau to strike and to strike again, and it was he who stopped them for a price. It was said that he had created nations and destroyed them, and sold them, and it was said that even the least educated tribes in the poorest black nations knew and dreaded the name *Black Magic*; and that *M. Three* could be seen in London and Paris and Moscow, or Peking or Tokyo or New York City, and that men in all of these cities knew of him. *M. Three* was a cloud of rain who appeared in any season to drop upon that dry earth which promised him the richest harvest. He was an international spy, independent even of patriotism, and to me he was merely a man of little morality about whom there had grown a legend.

'Yes,' nodded *M. Lumla*, 'it is this man who is coming here to escort you to the United Nations in New York.'

'He is here? In Albertville?'

'He is here.'

'You have seen him?'

'I have seen him and paid him,' said *M. Lumla*.

'But how much in money can it have cost?' I asked.

'Fifty thousand Badoshian dinars. Ah ah ah! you admonish me! But Adumbaba, Adumbaba, if we succeed—if the Secretary-General and the General Assembly of the United Nations will meet you, listen to you—it will have been an irreproachable investment.'

Fifty thousand Badoshian dinars! And all so that I would go to New York City, one man, to make a plea before strangers who might care nothing for me or my people. Now, such an amount might have fed all of the people in Albertville for a

week, allowing them even to become drunk once or twice and forgetful of their worries.

'Such was his price?' I asked, incredulous.

'I repeat,' M. Lumla told me: 'It will be a mighty investment.'

For a time I was thoughtful, and then I asked, 'What will happen when I am gone?'

'There will be war.'

'Now—' I began, but M. Lumla would not wait for me:

'If you stay and do not sign the paper destroying our party, we have war. If you stay and sign the paper, we have war. War cannot be avoided. Our hope is that you may travel speedily, that M. Rodriq will accept you as lost, as dead, and that even if he does not, the people will believe you are dead, for with you away from us, we will need at least your martyrdom to support us and give courage. This way, we shall be renewed and shall fight until you have achieved your mission. You will abruptly appear in New York City; and M. Three assures us that, for our price, he will arrange your meeting with the Secretary-General himself, for such a man knows people who know all other people. Yes, abruptly you will return to life, and the people will take heart, and M. Rodriq's Government will fear our petition, that petition of our people for independence, because you will have presented it to the world. Adumbaba will live! Badosh will live! You will return to lead us in independence, as strong in magic as M. Three himself, which will weaken Tebrou and Vusupu who oppose you. This is our plan. I know you will work for its success, Adumbaba, for you have never denied the people.'

This was the plan, then. I thought about it fearfully.

Quietly, we waited for the arrival of M. Three.

4 THE FLIGHT

In less than a half hour, the legend and man had come.

He appeared from the door which led to the back rooms of the house. He was dressed in a European-style suit, black,

double-breasted—I couldn't have guessed at his native country from looking at him. Nor would I have tried to then, for he greeted us with a large pasteboard box beneath one arm and, in his other hand, a pistol which seemed nearly as large.

'You are Premier Adumbaba,' he nodded to me after hurriedly scanning the group of us. 'Don't waste time gawking, please,' and he suddenly pocketed that pistol, then threw the pasteboard box to my feet, and I pulled away from it, frightened. He laughed, 'Clothes, Sir! Please! Put them on.'

What a strange man, that M. Three. He was as black as me and had a brilliant smile and large eyes and a fine strong profile, and he looked as if he more than all else enjoyed to laugh. I was surprised at his appearance, not thinking a man so close to laughter could be so immoral as I expected this man to be. His voice was powerful, so that I was affected by it. Hearing him, I knelt and opened the box and withdrew the European suit and quickly got myself into it. I seldom have worn a shirt needing a tie, and cannot easily fix one, and M. Lumla had to do this for me.

Then Lumla handed to me the portfolio, and he squeezed my hands tightly, then embraced me. The other members of my party embraced me.

'Now we go,' said M. Three quietly, but his powerful voice gave such quiet words resonance and authority. 'Come. I have a car waiting.'

I stood staring from M. Three to my friends.

'Go!' cried M. Lumla, waving his arms. 'Go!'

It was happening so quickly I did not understand.

But I followed dumbly after the agent, leaving the room with no more glances for my friends, and hurried with my escort out of the back of my house.

Behind the house, there is a little grove of trees, and we stole through these trees and then down a road until we came upon a narrow alley which led to a second alley almost perpendicular to it, which I had not myself seen before, and from there we took ourselves into a road which had always seemed farther from my house. Here, an automobile was parked, and in it,

a driver. The motor started. We climbed into the car. We sprang away.

We drove down that road and the darkness was rising fast about us, and it had settled after we had driven for nearly forty minutes, so that I knew that in Albertville, already behind me, trouble was only a matter of minutes away. Yes, it must have begun already; M. Rodriq had come to my house and my friends had told him they were waiting for me, but they would not wait long before M. Rodriq would call to his soldiers. War. Where was my dear Lumla now?

As we drove, M. Three laughed and talked to me, and asked me questions, and often spoke words which seemed inconsequential: 'And so you are going to New York?'

I waved away such questions, frowning, gesturing to the driver.

'The driver,' laughed he. 'Do not worry about the driver. The driver has been paid. Driver! Are you well paid?'

Without turning around, the driver said, 'I am well paid.'

'Trust him,' grinned M. Three, turning back to me.

And so I took to examining this man of violent notoriety who rode beside me.

M. Three laughed. 'You don't believe in me?'

'Yes, I do believe in you,' I told him.

'But your eyes say you do not. But here I am.'

'Yes. I cannot believe you are evil.'

'Is that what you are thinking?'

'Many stories about you are evil.'

'I am a man. Stories are stories.'

I nodded.

'No,' M. Three settled comfortably back, 'no one would call me evil. I go to everybody's church. What do you have in the portfolio, Premier Adumbaba?'

'A petition.'

'Yes, the petition of your people for independence. But perhaps New York City will be more comfortable than Albertville?'

'What do you mean?'

'Nothing. Have you looked inside the portfolio?'

'No.'

'But look inside. There must be money there.'

'Money? Why money?'

'There must be American dollars. There must be some kind of money. You cannot go to New York without money.'

'You are taking me there. This is what was said.'

'Yes, yes,' laughed M. Three. 'But I am not marrying you. I will take you to New York, I will take you to the Secretary-General of the United Nations. But I will not pay for your laundry. Look! Look inside the portfolio! I'm curious.'

And so I opened the portfolio, a little cautiously, now wondering whether there might be something inside which I should not share with M. Three. I found the bound petition of my people, which I had seen many times, and next I found an envelope, and next a smaller envelope.

'Look into the envelopes,' said M. Three.

'Perhaps they are letters for my eyes alone,' I told him.

'Look! Look!'

And so I looked into the larger envelope, and yes, there was money there. There were fifty pounds from England and there were twenty hundred-dollar bills from America, and some smaller American bills. I tried to count these bills and was astonished. 'Money,' I whispered.

M. Three laughed.

'So much money,' I said.

M. Three laughed loudly, slapping his thigh.

I shook my head and said again, 'So much money.'

'Not so much,' he said. 'A little more than two thousand American dollars. But it will have to do for you. I did not agree to brush your teeth. Look into the other envelope.'

I looked into the smaller envelope and saw that it was a letter, and I decided not to read it, saying, 'It is a letter for me. I will read it later.'

In a little while, M. Three said, 'There are only a few minutes. Then we will reach the plane. Premier Adumbaba, please read your letter now. It is best. If there is trouble, it

may be that you will wish to destroy that letter. It is best to know.'

I asked him what he meant by suggesting trouble.

'Trouble is my wife,' he answered. 'This is why I am richly dowered. I know my wife's business and know how she loves secrecy, only to make my life difficult. Secret letters to her are wine. Premier Adumbaba, read the letter now and determine if it is something to keep or destroy.' For the first time, M. Three looked at me and not even his eyes suggested more than solemnity.

I looked into his eyes, and then slowly withdrew the letter from the portfolio. This was the letter :

TO THE MEN AND WOMEN OF ALL NATIONS

We are the people of Badosh. The undersigned are those who, with the bearer of our letter—M. Pernin Adumbaba, Premier of Badosh—have formed and lead the One Party of the People of Badosh, BAPIATLP. We beg the ear of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Listen to our Premier! We beg the ears of the General Assembly of the United Nations. Listen to our Premier!

Signed, and Sealed with the New Great Seal of Badosh, Hereon Used for the First Time.

That statement was signed with the names of all of those who directed the fortunes of our party, nineteen names in all, the first of which was the signature of Stajo Lumla. And the Seal, the Great Seal of Badosh which we had created long before against our day of independence and freedom, I here saw it used officially at last, and it was beautiful to me upon that letter.

I showed the letter to M. Three, who scanned it and then the automobile slowed. M. Three looked up, handing the letter back to me.

'We are here,' he said.

In the darkness I could see nothing as the car stopped.

Then, suddenly, a light came on somewhere ahead of us; it seemed to be moving. I heard a voice far in the darkness, as if calling at us, and M. Three opened the door and stepped out,

then requested both myself and the driver to follow him.

I caught sight of the plane as I left the car: it was huge. I know now that it was not so immense, but it was the first time I looked upon a plane so close, and it had a long nose and two great propellers and a great body, with wide majestic wings. One of those propellers began to turn, and another light went on farther down the meadow.

I heard a new voice as I crossed the field with M. Three and the driver, and then a loud noise which I thought came from the plane echoed across that dark field; it was followed by another; I saw lights moving with great speed far down that field, moving in our direction.

M. Three was hitting at me, crying, '*Down, down, down!*' He knocked me to the earth, where I lay between the driver and the agent, and the car which had rushed at us now stood stopped. M. Three had his pistol up and he fired at the car.

There was silence.

'Is it a good welcome, driver?' growled M. Three, but then there were more shots. M. Three went up to his knees and fired but I could not look for some seconds.

A man was running towards us. I saw him, and saw him fall. M. Three had shot him. He was a white man, who cried out and dropped, and I felt sick for him.

Again I closed my eyes but soon M. Three was hitting at my back, '*Up, up,*' and I got up and stood stupidly staring down at the agent. I could not believe what I saw.

M. Three had shot the man who had been beside me, the driver. He shot him in the face twice, and I remember grasping my own cheeks as if in defence. He shot him again! Then again! The man, I tell you, had no face left. I cried out for him to stop, but M. Three only snatched the portfolio from my hand, opening it, withdrawing the small letter I had shown him. This he stuffed into the inside pocket of the dead driver's jacket, and then—as cold as the corpse would soon be, seemed he to me!—he paused to reload his pistol and shot that man's face once more and twice again before putting the pistol up, and I felt certain for a moment that he meant to kill me then.

'To the plane!' he cried, pushing my portfolio back at me.

I turned and began to stumble towards the plane.

Once again the great propellers were turning. There was a man at the door of the plane and he helped me up into the steel machine, and I sat upon the hard floor of the plane and watched the man next haul M. Three himself into the plane. The machine shook as if to explode. The door was closed. I smelled petrol and thought there must have been a leak. The curious room was only sparsely lighted and the man who had helped me into the plane accidentally stepped upon my hand as he hurried past me, through the narrow grey door at the front of the plane.

Then more explosively yet did the plane shake, it rumbled and I held hard to the floor itself and looked at M. Three, who sat a few feet from me, leaning back against the curving wall of the plane. He looked thinner than he had only minutes before; he strained at something, and lowered his head. He looked up at me from his lowered face and chuckled, saying something that I could not hear for the noise.

'What?' I said loudly to him, but my voice too did not lift above the rumbling.

He closed his eyes, nodded. I moved somewhat closer to him, nearly rolling upon him as the plane careered off into a new kind of motion; we were in the air, the plane veering about in search of its course.

'Premier Adumbaba,' said M. Three, 'listen to me.'

'What is it?' I was afraid of him, I admit, but at the same time worried for him and for myself, knowing I had to trust him. He had killed a man and killed and mutilated another, but had spared me. 'What is it, M. Three?'

'Premier Adumbaba,' he said again, then laughed softly, looking over at me. 'There are those in your country wanting you dead. Soon they must report you are dead. And Badosh has its martyr.'

'This is why you killed the driver.'

'He was well paid. I judge by myself. He who is well paid once will take the trouble to be well paid again. He had to die in any case.'

'You meant to kill him all along?'

'Adumbaba,' he said, 'listen to me. There are those who would have Black Magic dead. There are those to profit in blood and sorrow upon the death of Mr. Three. And there are those who depend upon his life. You are a Premier only, but to some I am a god. A god! Do you know?'

'I know.'

'Adumbaba, I am dying.'

'M. Three, you are shot?'

'Shot and shot well. I am dying.'

'I will tell the pilot to go back!' I said, starting to crawl off.

'No, no! Adumbaba, my adventures end here. I cannot help you in New York City, but still you may go. What a time to lose my magic!—you can't know; for I had other business in New York which would,' but he stopped, grimacing with the pain of an impatient man, a man who feels more anger than suffering.

'I will tell the pilot to land,' I said again.

'No!' He opened his eyes. 'Adumbaba, do this for me. Take my papers, take all my papers and my money. It is mostly Badoshian money in my pocket today, anyhow. Will you do this? Do not let them know that Three is dead. Tell no one! This I ask you, dying. Do you understand?'

I tried to understand but mumbled and shook my head.

'Premier Adumbaba, thousands of black men take hope from my life. For them, it is better if I live. You surely can understand, you who also have a life whose value passes swiftly from life to death to life. Adumbaba, you will live to lead your people. I will not live, will not live to help you or to help those who love or fear me; but magic is powerful, and I may be dead a hundred years and still people will say of me, "*Take courage; for he will return.*" Take my papers! Destroy them when you can. As for my body, in an hour we will be over tribeless jungle. Discard my body. Discard it! It is useless! Adumbaba, this is what I request of you; it is all the payment I ask.'

'Gods, gods,' I whispered, not knowing what to do.

'Discard my body. Promise!'

I waited and watched, wondering, and all at once I saw that

M. Three was dead. The man beside me did not live. It was a body only beside me.

'Gods, gods,' I cried out within myself. 'It is war.'

I took from him his papers and also his pistol. I took from him his money and his clothes. With fear, I pulled back the door and the screeching wind rushed in. Slowly, with fear, did I discard the body of the man who did not wish to be dead, M. Three.

For some time, I sat alone in that large room of the plane, trying to think all things out. I could not think what to do. My escort was dead and I was being directed into the future only by the pilot of the plane, who did not realize I was alone. Where was I going? Tunis! Why? To go to London? Who would take me to London? And from London to New York? M. Three had not given me any idea of who were those people who might put me before the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and so there would be no one to help me there. I decided that the pilot might be able to answer some of the questions, at least, and finally managed to get to my knees, then to my feet, and I moved slowly to the door which led me into the cabin where the pilot sat flying the plane.

He was startled as I appeared. I looked into his fear and all at once realized I carried M. Three's pistol in my right hand, then saw that there was blood on the pistol. The plane lurched suddenly, but I caught hold of the back of the pilot's seat and then the plane flew smoothly again.

'What is it?' cried the pilot. 'What happened?'

I did not know what to say. I wanted to say, 'M. Three is dead,' but I felt I would betray that man even if I spoke to his pilot.

'That man, with me,' I began uncertainly.

'Yes,' the pilot kept staring at me, his hand loose upon the stick with which he guided the plane.

I shook my head. At last I said, 'Where are we going?'

'Tunis.'

'And then?'

The pilot looked from my eyes to the pistol and then back into my eyes once more.

'Have you not been paid?' I asked.

'I have been well paid. The other man paid me. Is he dead?'

I said nothing.

'Did you kill him?' the pilot asked of me.

'No,' I said.

'He is dead? Was he a friend of yours?'

'You do not know who he was?'

'He was the man to pay me,' said the pilot. 'I did not ask his name. You do not know his name?'

'He is dead,' I told him. 'He was shot before coming on to the plane.'

'We must be rid of the body!' the pilot exclaimed, but I saw he still did not trust me. He stared at my pistol and his hand remained frozen to the stick.

'I have got rid of the body,' I told him.

He kept staring at me.

'After we arrive at Tunis, what do we do?'

'It is supposed to be arranged,' he told me. 'I know where to land and we will refuel and fly to London. In London, it is also arranged, and then we fly to New York.'

'You will take me to New York?'

'To a place near New York. Have you changed your mind?' asked the pilot.

I could well think about his question. Would it not be wiser to return, to go back to Albertville, to my people, to tell M. Lumla of the death of M. Three? But my friends would be disappointed, for they believed me on the way to the United Nations, on the way perhaps to the deliverance of my people.

'Fly,' I said, gesturing ahead with the pistol as I kept hold of the back of the man's seat.

The pilot looked off in the dark direction in which I gestured, then back to me. 'I *am* flying,' he said as if in his own defence.

'Then fly,' I said wearily, and I left the pilot and returned to sit by myself upon the floor of the large room of the plane.

I examined M. Three's papers, then, and counted his money. There was more than I had anticipated. There were the fifty thousand Badoshian dinars, but there was also American

money, British money, French money and some money I could not recognize or read. All of it was paper money.

His papers were few and to me were meaningless. There was a piece of paper upon which were written the words *North South East West*, and perhaps that could enlighten someone, but that did not enlighten me. Other than that, there was but one short letter in English, which spoke of a meeting in New York City with a person described only as *M. M. M.*

Chapter 3

1 A LITTLE CHILD

M. M. MacNail was impatient. It is a fact. To suggest it as a theory would do MacNail an undeniable artistic injustice. The impatience which collected dynamically within and about the roles of MacNailian flesh, which tirelessly rippled between brow and chin, was a voluptuous paragraph, a carnal sketch which was astir against a multi-dimensional master-spasm never to be finished; it was a lunar tide lifting, a tropical wind sifting; his impatience was the brewing and chewing latency of a vehement hurricane. For MacNail was certain the week of Mr. Three's coming had begun. He was even sure it was ending. Four days of the appointed week had begun, he estimated, and four days were closing, and he sat in his office at the end of the fourth day, melting down candle stubs, of which colourless meltings he now had nearly enough for the moulding of a new candle; and as he melted, he kept his eyes on the rove about his office, as if expecting that Three would suddenly take shape out of the night itself, appear black from the black shadows.

But the shadows stayed shadows. Three remained amidst his own shadows. And the imminent hurricane which made wild waves of the ripples on MacNail's face rose, the scornful impatience threatened the storm. MacNail stood up. His mouth opened.

'I wait no longer! We're going collecting. Gibber, fetch Nump!' Gibber scurried. 'What time is it, Falkshound?'

Falkshound came to attention. 'Two, Sir.'

'Already? Why, it can't be midnight yet. Is it a joke?'

'It's two in the afternoon, Sir.'

MacNail put his hands in his pockets. 'You mean it isn't night?'

'I,' and Falkshound considered it, to conclude, 'I doubt it, Sir.'

'And is the sun shining?'

'It was,' Falkshound looked at the black curtains.

'I don't like it, Falkshound,' said MacNail, when Gibber returned with the large, dead-eyed woman called Nump, the only female agent upon MacNail's staff.

Nump was something of a giant, and had a gritty complexion, so that some of the agents, behind her great and sprawling back, called her Sahara, her real and entire name being Claudia Sarah Nump. Nump's immensity was all the more prominent beside the Director of SEA, whose stature was dependent upon what his face could achieve for it. He came up to Claudia Nump's belly. MacNail despised those moments when he had to call upon her, for it required every ounce of his tact and facial theatrics to keep Nump in her place.

'Nump,' said MacNail, 'I have a job for you. A delicate one, I call it.'

'Death,' muttered Nump unconcernedly, her favourite expression.

'I have had these super-agents of mine out on the city, Nump, looking for one man. Only one. Mr. Three. Black Magic. Yes, he is within a few inches of us right now. I expect he has seen each of my agents, but not one of them has seen him. In three days, Nump—*poof!*—Black Magic! Well, I have to go finger him, myself. Will you admit it is disgraceful?'

Nump scratched her head.

'And in the daylight,' added MacNail, giving his face over to a two-step, a twist of the big apple and a touch of extraordinarily woogie boogie. 'There are only three days left to his week in New York, Nump. I'm convinced of it. I've got to find him in three days. I've got to go out by sunlight. I hate sunlight, Nump.'

'Death and turnips,' grunted Nump.

'Never mind all that. Nump, it's this way: I've had to select a disguise, and the one I chose needs a female accessory. What do you suppose it is?'

'Cologne?' muttered Nump vacantly, who now pulled from her pocket a large wad of knitting the colour of dirty chamois, which she proceeded to knit as she stood.

'I am going to use the disguise,' announced MacNail, 'of a child. Miss Nump, you are to be my mother.'

MacNail, opening a top drawer of his desk, produced a small suit of clothing which included a tiny sailor cap, a white middy with a broad blue collar, and short pants.

'It is the latest style,' said MacNail. 'Turn around, Nump. I'm going to dress.'

Nump shrugged and, keeping her eyes on her knitting, slowly turned, muttering, 'It won't help the others, though.'

'You don't know me, Nump,' stated MacNail, to settle the matter, and so anxious was he to settle it that he couldn't manoeuvre his face into the proper *Or-Else Scowl (Size 17B)*, instead dispersing a few loose glances from the *Fancy-Meeting-You-Here* series, which he tried to retrieve before they should be misunderstood, and it was a minute or two before he could concentrate upon his dressing. Women were wholly beyond his ken, and had been since he had first tried to understand his mother, a woman who offered him love for nothing, a proposition he realized he was right not to have trusted when, while he himself was only seven, she died; had he accepted her love, he reasoned, she would have taken it to the grave with her, Indian-giving it to immortality. Women were unmanageable, illogical, undependable. 'Nump will know me! Make a note of it, Templeback.'

'Right.'

'Write it on your eyeballs,' snapped MacNail. 'What's the matter, Mother Courage? You look thoughtful. I hope you're thinking of your little boy. Are you thinking of me?'

Nump had been inspecting the sailor-suited MacNail quizzically. 'They'll think I went to bed with a prune.'

'If you don't like their thoughts, arrest them. Let's go.'

2 THE AGENTS' LUNCHEON

As father, uncle and godfather respectively, Templeback, Pebble and Reichstooop accompanied MacNail and Claudia Nump as they left the dark, cool halls of SEA to march out into the broad daylight, the sun's glare seeming smashing to and destructive of M. M. MacNail, who resolved that he would have the Congressional Medal of Honour for his work of this day; or, in fact, of any other day, since the open light of day was to him like some heated artillery of the nation's enemies at large, into which he was courageously, heroically, stealthily and determinedly moving.

MacNail initiated his search by looking for African restaurants, and finally they took themselves to a Harlem restaurant for lunch, choosing an inexpensive café which was otherwise frequented entirely by Negroes. MacNail reasoned that Mr. Three was most likely to show up in any one of a hundred places as ordinary as that one, and it was just such a place.

'It's cheap,' clarified Miss Nump, who ordered a steak.

'Steak!' bellowed MacNail, the little face beneath the tiny sailor cap seeming to test four or five different and equally undesirable Emotions-Systems at one and the same time. 'This lunch is paid for by the Government, Ma'am, which is mine, not yours. Steak is expensive. Toast and lemon water, Ma'am; toast to strengthen the blood, lemon water to clean it. I eat nothing but toast and drink nothing but lemon water.'

'Beans,' mumbled Miss Nump.

'Still too expensive,' said MacNail. 'Toast and lemon water. That meat, Ma'am, is as raw as a savage would want, and I expect a savage has got it.'

'Death,' muttered Nump through her steak.

'Death yourself,' retorted MacNail. 'Templeback, do you know anything about the Oedipus Complex?'

'Not me,' Templeback answered hurriedly, setting down his lemon water.

'Well, it's cancelled,' spat MacNail. 'Where is Three, Templeback?'

Templeback chuckled, shaking his head.

'Where is he?' demanded MacNail. 'I'll find him. You know what I'll do to him when I find him, Templeback?'

Templeback, still smiling, touched his head with the disclaimer of one finger, slowly shaking the head he touched.

Miss Nump swallowed and said, 'You'll blind him if you're merciful.'

'Women have more courage than men,' observed MacNail. 'Why is that, Templeback?'

Templeback began to raise his finger to his head once more, and was about to smile, and MacNail looked impatiently, as it were, at Reichstoop—

'Why is that, Reichstoop?'

'No brains,' suggested Reichstoop. 'Dumb people haven't got the brains to be scared.'

'Reichstoop, your answer will do,' nodded MacNail, sitting back and seeming to relax and even becoming mildly expansive after his lunch. 'Pebble, you aren't drinking your lemon water. Bottoms up, lad! It's that or mutiny. What about it, Pebble? What will I do to Threc when I have him in these two hands?'

'There is no one of us to cast the first stone,' said Pebble tightly through almost painfully puckered lips, setting down his lemon water and putting his fingers to his running eyes.

'I'll tell you what I'm going to do, then,' and a grand chuckle emerged—if thinly and spasmodically, it still emerged—from MacNail's mouth, and Pebble silently cursed his luck in thinking that he might actually have seen the Director's mouth itself, for the first time, had his eyes not been watered blind with acid. 'I'm going to kiss him. What do you think of that?'

The men stared and Nump swallowed her meat and, after burying her face briefly in her napkin, she said, 'Not even blinding him would protect him from that. It's diabolical, MacNail, diabolical.'

'You shut up,' MacNail wheezed at her. 'Lock your teeth, Ma'am, lock them tight now, and I mean my warning fiercely. There are times, I tell you, when I'm convinced you don't give two hoots or a figseed for that niece of yours chained up in the cellar.'

'I keep telling you she isn't my niece,' sighed Nump, flattening her mouth and gazing upon MacNail emptily, her deserted countenance in bold contrast to the fifth act of *Titus Andronicus* which was just then being presented by MacNail's face.

'I have my doubts about it,' said MacNail, shaking his head and nodding all at the same time, 'but even if what you say is true, humanity, Ma'am, common humanity requires you to show the poor girl *some* consideration. And you a mother! *Shame!* Yes,' he turned back to the men, 'I shall kiss my boy when I find him. He and I, we're two of a kind, we are. Masters of the black arts, we are, and there are no more like us. There's real substance in my boy's *nom d'Afrique*: Black Magic. Wonder if I should change my own to White Magic. Well, by God, that's the way it is, and he'll recognize me as his father as sure as I see my son in him. This is what I've decided. And, by God, it had better be that way, Templeback, or you're through!'

Templeback sat up erect and quickly tapped at his head, shaking the same head vigorously.

MacNail let Nump pay the cashier and, as they walked out into the brilliant sunlight, MacNail pulling the broad blue collar of his middy up about his face as best he could, Nump said: 'I meant to ask you, Erosion Face, why you've duded yourself up as a raisin. What's the disguise for?'

MacNail growled and, so displeased was he with what seemed impertinence on Nump's part, he stepped on Templeback's toe and kicked Pebble in the shin. 'Nobody suspects a dear little child of duplicity,' said MacNail. 'You're too slow, Nump. Reichstoop is right; you're not afraid of me because you're stupid. You're older than you were two minutes ago; arteries hardening. Dressed like this I can go anywhere, ask anyone anything, and no one will say MacNail was there,' he threw his arms out, '*voilà!*' A man passing by dropped a nickel into one of MacNail's hands. MacNail pulled it in and examined it, bit at it and watched suspiciously as his benefactor wandered off shaking his head.

'Yes,' said MacNail as they walked with studied and stiff agent-like casualness down the Harlem street, 'I adore my

son. It came to me only a while ago. It is not enough that Three should work for me. He should live with me, study with me. He should sleep by day and peep by night. One day he will direct SEA like his father before him. That's how I reckon. How do you reckon, Reichstoop?'

Reichstoop's stoop started. 'On my fingers,' he lifted a splay-fingered hand. 'Still on my fingers, Sir.'

'Well, that's how *I* reckon,' affirmed MacNail. 'And, gentlemen, what am I going to do if Three denies that I am his father? Templeback?'

Templeback hesitated, then replied, 'You'll give it to him, all right.'

'Give? Give?' MacNail thrust forward thirteen basic ex-foliations from the third subgrouping (second section) of the *Inquisitorial Division, Autocratic Class*, in .4 of one second. 'Have you any precedent for such a remark? Do I give? Have I given anything to you, Templeback? Be careful: I may set a precedent and give you something you won't soon misplace. What will I do if Three denies his father, Pebble?'

'I'm sure it's not my turn, Sir,' Pebble inclined his head away from MacNail as if to get that head start on any impending blow.

MacNail choked on his disgust and said, 'You are so stupid, gentlemen, that if I weren't so pleased by it, I'd skewer you and sewer you. I could get more reasonable answers from any stranger,' and to provide instant verification of that theory, MacNail took hold of the arm of a passerby, who glanced down on MacNail and said:

'Oh dear Christ!'

'Not exactly,' said MacNail. 'I'm only a little boy who wishes to ask you a question. *Permettez?* What does a father do to the child who denies him?'

'Let go of my sleeve! *Ugh!* how disgusting! Let go, you goblin!'

'Goblin, is it? I see. Very well. What is your number?'

'Number? Let me go! I haven't got a number!'

'What's this?' MacNail turned accusingly on Templeback. 'This man hasn't been numbered. What does it mean?'

Templeback swallowed and took hold of the man's other arm. 'What's your number, fellow?'

'*What* number? My Social Security Number?'

'That's more like it,' said Templeback. 'Let's have it.'

The man, looking wildly from Templeback to MacNail, recited his Social Security Number and MacNail memorized it at once.

'What's your mother's number?' asked MacNail.

'My mother is dead.'

'How about your sister?'

'What is this? What do you people want?'

'We'll ask the questions,' said Templeback in his smoothest and most agent-like manner.

Pebble, who was excited by the incident and who also didn't want MacNail to notice his remoteness, stepped up to ask, rather timidly, 'What is your name?'

'What's that to you?' demanded the man. 'Let go of me! Are you police?'

'We're police, all right,' said Reichstoop, putting himself before the man.

'I didn't do anything,' protested the man.

'Your sister says differently,' announced MacNail.

'She's lying!'

'A man who calls his sister a liar is a liar himself,' growled Miss Nump, who herself seemed a little thrilled by the sudden adventure.

'Which sister?' inquired the man, his eyes darting almost guiltily about the strange new Law which confronted him. 'If it was Lena, I'll tell you something about Lena: she's a tramp.'

'Where is Lena now?' MacNail asked.

The man gave them Lena's address.

'Arrest Lena,' MacNail ordered Reichstoop. 'You're relieved until you get this man and Lena back to headquarters. We'll find out what you've done, my man, and when we do, it won't go easy with you.'

'All right, fellow,' Reichstoop took the arm which Templeback surrendered. 'Let's go.'

They went away with the man muttering, 'That tramp, that rotten little tramp . . . my own sister!'

'This world,' remarked MacNail as he strolled on with Nump, Pebble and Templeback, 'is thick with guilt. Well, we'll purge it. Where was I? Yes, yes, I was asking what I will do if Three denies his father.'

'Ask another stranger,' said Pebble, his voice strangely light, almost tickled by a giggle. 'That's fun.'

'I'll tell you what I'll do,' MacNail went on. 'I'll shake his hand. A man like Three is a man like MacNail. Not to be trusted. A man who denies his father isn't to be trusted. *Ergo*, it may be he's not denying his father at all. A man as clever as Three moves indirectly. I *want* him to deny me; otherwise, he'll be denying me. Yes, I'll shake his hand.'

Harlem supporting some hundreds of thousands of Negroes, it was extremely difficult for the SEA agents, even for the astute Director himself, to feel certain of the innocence of a goodly number of persons whose paths crossed theirs that afternoon, with the result that they arrested eighty-six persons, singly and in groups, having them transported by special SEA bus to the prison chambers beneath headquarters.

And, as twilight listlessly settled in upon the city, MacNail began to feel more comfortable and he moved more quickly, determinedly, precisely, rounding up during the evening an additional sixty-odd individuals any one of whom might have seemed sufficiently shrewd and distrustful of face for MacNail to suspect him of being his son.

Having some hundred and fifty suspects to interrogate, MacNail, towards midnight, at last returned to his office and began his personal interviews of the Negroes who had been brought to justice that day.

3 INTERROGATIONS

The first man to be interviewed was not brought in, but charged energetically into MacNail's presence.

'Well, well,' said MacNail, peering' curiously in forty or

fifty separate ways over his candle. 'You're in a hurry, my man. Can't wait to see me, is that it? Have something to tell me? Perhaps you are my son. Are you my son?' MacNail studied the man another moment: the fellow stood with torn shirt and even torn trousers, his hair long and wet and tangled, his face riotously whiskered, his eyes red, haggard, and the very look of him made MacNail feel cold and damp. From under the dark whiskers, MacNail thought he perceived light. 'You aren't black. You're an impostor. I think I understand. You're a spy. You're sent from Bulsht, is that it? A spy has worked his way into my organisation. Damn it. I just don't like it. I don't like it at all.'

'I'm not a spy, Sir, I'm not a spy,' moaned the desperate prisoner. 'Don't you recognize me, Sir? Don't you recognize me? It's me! Blister!'

'Blister!' MacNail arose slowly behind his desk, his fists clenched, his face gone clumsy in its dancing or clever in its gymnastics, gone in either event, and even his voice wavered distantly: 'Blister. So you've come back. You deserted and now you've come back begging. What have you got to say for yourself before I condemn you?'

'Sir, Sir,' pleaded Blister, sinking to his knees, 'I never went away. I was in Cell Row Forty-four, Sir. I've been locked in there for years, I don't know how many years, I lost track, but tonight, Sir—perhaps it was tonight, Sir—they started to bring in new prisoners. The place has never been so crowded, and then all at once they started to take the new prisoners out again, they were bringing them up here, and somehow I got myself into the crowd of them. All Negroes they were, except me, and weeping, and wretched, Sir, and I came along with them, and here I am, brought straight to you. Tell me you recognize me, Sir! Tell me you remember good old Blister! Faithful old Blister!'

MacNail gazed upon the suppliant some while longer, and then said, 'You've changed Blister. You've changed.'

'Oh, but my heart is still the same! Loyal! There was no man more loyal to his Director than faithful old Blister!'

'But you've changed,' insisted MacNail. 'You look bad and

you smell bad. I require a certain neatness of person in my organization. Blister, you stink hideously.'

'I think I can explain, Sir!'

'All the worse. You've not only become dirty, you've become thoughtful. You're finished, Blister. I take note of your fidelity and suffering and mean to let you live.'

'Heaven will love you for it, Sir,' wept Blister, squeezing his hands together.

'I'm going to let you live,' repeated MacNail, 'even though your life is worthless to me. Take note of that, Templeback. You remember Templeback, Blister? Take note of that, Gibber. The man means nothing to me. But he shall live.'

Gibber made himself smile and he said, 'Paradise wafts a sweet scent through these halls tonight.'

'It's not Paradise and it's not sweet,' said MacNail. 'Send him back, Templeback. Send him back to Row Forty-four before I gag.'

As Blister was being removed, his hands still knotted importunately together, he called out, 'Heaven will love you, Sir.'

'Heaven indeed,' grunted MacNail. 'Bring in the next man, and he'd better be black this time, and he'd better be my son and full of magic or, by the Saints, he'll be black magic to someone. Next one, Gibber!'

Gibber hurried to his task and admitted into the room a tall and lanky Negro who seemed considerably venerable, perhaps past seventy.

'You aren't my son,' complained MacNail. 'You're older than I am.'

The Negro bent his head forward to study MacNail's geography. 'I don't know about that,' he said, 'but you sure are right and I ain't your son. Listen, old man, let me out, huh?'

'Let you out,' scoffed MacNail. 'Can you give me thirty-one reasons why I should let you out?'

The Negro contemplated that. Soon he said, 'Look here, I didn't do nothing at all, old man,' appending, after another brief examination of all that was MacNail, 'I think.'

'Your sister says differently,' snapped MacNail.

'I ain't got no sister.'

'Your brother dresses like a girl,' MacNail said fiercely. 'I suppose you see nothing strange in that?'

'Old man, I see nothing that *ain't* strange today, I tell you for a fact. I ain't got no brother and I ain't go no sister and I ain't your son and I ain't going back to that dungeon down there, neither.'

'Do you have a cousin?' MacNail asked momentarily.

'I believe I do. Although I ain't seen his hide in twenty years.'

'Well, he dresses like a girl, calls himself your sister and says you're guilty,' concluded MacNail. 'Gibber! Next man!'

The old Negro paused at the door as he was being removed, turning around to ask: 'Which cousin was that? Was that Louie? Because I can tell you something about Louie, old man: Louie is a no-good tramp.'

'We'll get him, too,' promised MacNail. 'Next man, I tell you, Gibber.'

The old Negro, muttering, 'My own cousin,' was removed, and a younger Negro, fat and angry and quick-gestured, was allowed entrance.

MacNail's telephone started to ring as MacNail eyed, or seemed to eye, the plump interviewee sternly, the latter having begun to talk the moment he entered:

'Name's Faubus Tom Faulkner,' he presented MacNail with a business card, 'you call me Tom. Don't know why you brung me in, man . . . man? . . . yeah; because I ain't done *no* one no trouble, I ain't even *sit* nowhere. But I tell you one thing: you going to be regretful, you going to be sit-in *now*, man, you going to be demonstrated and Muslined if you doesn't let me go, because I is vicious, beastly and coloured, and as such I got true friends who . . . hey you, there, you hear me, does you? Lord, Lord, oughtn't never've come North. Listen, what you doing, shrivelling up thataway whilst innocents is being summoned in off street and roof, what *you* got to shrivel about, anyhow? Me, I been broomed in off the street, *whisk!* *whisk!*' he drove a fist through the air, 'like they thought I throwed myself away, like . . . say, your phone's ringing. Ain't you got ears? Ain't you got hands? Say.' Faulkner pulled his head down, eyeing MacNail suspiciously. 'What

is you? Ain't you got eyes? If you got eyes, what you looking at? If you looking at me, what you looking out of? Say . . . you got any *you* in you? Why don't you turn on some lights? Phone ringing, nobody answers, skin blinking, nobody there, candle sinking . . . glory, glory, maybe I is died, got hit by a bus and died. Oh, Lord, I is doing a lay-in! Oughtn't never've come North. Got to think, got to think . . . you! answer that phone, you, thing, you, whatever you is! Okay, I just answer it myself,' and he reached for the receiver, 'likely for me, anyhow; the old Master, he going to bail me out. Must've saddened him to hear I is dead.'

'Don't touch that phone!' screeched MacNail, his mobile flesh flushing yellow. Faulkner withdrew his hand and knotted it into his other as MacNail, suspecting that this fat fellow who seemed capable of distracting anyone might be his cunning son, abstractly picked up the receiver.

It was Agent Polyp, who reported that he had received a message from the police about a lunatic who had only a few hours earlier attempted to scale the United Nations Building, and whose explanation was far from satisfying the police, who were investigating the man while the man, himself, was placed in the Psychiatric Ward at Lowland Hospital. The man insisted he was Pernin Adumbaba, the former Premier of Badosh who had been slain a few days before in an attempted escape from house arrest in Albertville, Badosh; and he insisted that his purpose was to see the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The man, in the company of still another lunatic, spoke good English but persisted in using a crisp accent which might actually have been African, and he carried upon his person small amounts of money from several nations, including Badosh itself, in whose currency he had the greatest amount.

'A black man?' said MacNail.

'Aye, Sir, even so,' replied Polyp.

'That phone call f'me?' asked Faubus Tom Faulkner.

'Why did they put him in the Psychiatric Ward?'

'He was climbing a wall of glass windows, Director MacNail. He was a few flights up, too.'

'Good boy!'

'They found something else on him, too, Sir.'

'Well? Well?'

'A gun,' said Polyp. 'And papers. One of them referred to a meeting with a man identified by three M's.'

'Polyp!' exclaimed MacNail.

'Yeah?' muttered Faubus suspiciously.

MacNail dropped the receiver and shouted, 'Templeback!'

Templeback was, fortunately, standing four or so feet away and could respond unhesitatingly: 'Right!'

'There is a man in the Psychiatric Ward at Lowland Hospital. He calls himself Adumbaba. He is my son. Bring him to me. Damn, I'll have those doctors' licences for humiliating that boy!' MacNail had clenched not only his hands, but his entire face as well, into fists. 'Templeback! At once!'

'Right!'

'Gibber!'

'Sir?'

'Who is this fat man standing in front of me?'

Faubus Tom Faulkner looked about ruefully, as if hoping to find some other fat man.

Gibber, standing alongside Faubus, nudged the latter, speaking from the corner of his mouth: 'What was your name again?'

'Me?' Faubus rubbed his hands together. 'Faubus. Faubus Tom Faulkner.'

'I've seen enough,' said MacNail. 'Take him away. Templeback, what are you waiting for? You're just standing there. Thoughts of rebellion, is that it? Get the Director in the back the moment he turns around, is that it? I warn you, Templeback, it won't work. Bring my son to me.' MacNail stopped talking, abruptly aware that Templeback some few sentences before had dashed from his office.

Chapter 4

I A NEW DISCIPLE

I came into New York City with no time for Tunis, nor even London, and could not care. My heart I carried heavy from Albertville, a thing inside me to squeeze against my lungs and keep my breath slow and mournful. My pilot was faithful. I do not know by what manoeuvres or contacts he took me from one nation to the next, but surely he was part of a chain he did not dare to break.

As if with that plane above the huge clouds, my spirits lifted while crossing the spreading ocean. It was, I think, that I had to prepare myself for the tasks ahead. I could not nurse my own heart to excess: having not the time to mend my own sorrows, I tried to divest myself of them. For I was a real part of the war in which I was certain: my people struggled, and needed anger, reason and strength, no children of sorrow.

My pilot left me near a small city in that State which is Connecticut, and was able to give me directions to the train which would take me to New York; and then I sat upon a marvellous fast train, heavy and soft and comfortable, and watched green trees, green fields, green woods, green hills, interrupted often by brick-rust houses and buildings; and sometimes passed stations at which there were large groups of brown and black people, such as at the city called New Rochelle.

And then, New York City!

And in my first hour in this centre of all noise and sudden silence, of the richness of heaven and the poverty of hell, this centre I say of the species of man, and of man's progress, this centre of monuments to his love and his fear, did I quickly remember M. Three's words to me, which were a threat and

a warning: 'But perhaps New York will be more comfortable than Albertville?'

For I had not imagined that there was such an arrangement of man and man's genius so enormously compact as to leave me bewildered, stunned, excited, nervous, forgetful. Why, such a city will make a man forget his gods, his family! It was monstrous, it was endless, it made me think of certain tales my mother had told to me, and others told to me by my uncle, when I was small, which were tales of impossible lands and of fervent hells, of red grass and green skies, of wide civilizations beneath the yellow earth and settled at the bottom of big still rivers. I had seen pictures of the buildings of New York City, and knew the buildings were high, but I did not imagine this motion, this light, this fervour. No, I say M. Three was right to warn me, for I was my first hours there truly forgetful of my responsibilities. It did not occur to me to like or dislike, but only to see and to surrender myself to this strangeness, to my amazement. M. Three warned me well, yes, for if M. Rodriq were in this splendid city, I might have been too comfortable in house arrest itself!

Having much money, I took for myself a room in a small hotel, too fearful of entering a larger, more grand hotel, and after looking at my room and becoming satisfied with it, I set out once again upon the broad deep city. Having no baggage, I was obliged to pay for my room in advance, and doing so, made my first loss, for I was not to see that hotel or that room again.

Such a city is friendly. I found friendship at more than one corner. In small towns in Africa, a man must gaze upon a stranger with care. He will not trust him quickly. In New York, perhaps no one expects to have seen a man before or to see him again. It seems so. Perhaps no one expects anyone else to be like himself; it does seem so. Therefore, each person will accord to the next a certain respect and willingness. I say, 'Where may I eat meat?' The strange attractive man smiles largely as he answers: 'Mit? . . . wuhkanimit?' I say: I would eat beef.' The friendly man smiles and glances around to point me towards a bright restaurant, saying: 'Budezuh chiphless don

fuddyseknsrit, bugnanteen.' This he translates and I go into that bright restaurant and soon, with careless assistance from total strangers, am taught to take a tray and move along in a line of people and I will be served with them. I am to point to my food and, in astonishment, I point to many things, so that my tray is fat with brilliant foods: I have a salad of tomato and lettuce and great fresh shrimp, I have another salad of egg and mayonnaise; I have the side of a chicken and the breast of a fish and the steak of beef; I have many hot vegetables and potatoes; I have rolls and breads and butter and jam, I have a pie and a pudding and coffee and a sweet red drink. The cost of all of this is shocking, but it is my first meal in America and I am still forgetful and I sit and eat and find I am hungry. I eat all I have bought, though it is difficult to put so much into my stomach. It is delicious. all of the food is delicious. This is New York City. The lights are green and white and red and yellow and blue and nervous and shattering, and the café is warm and the people chatter, clattering dishes, and the food is fine. And then I go back into the street.

How quickly I made a strange new friend in this city, so giving is New York.

And what a very beautiful friend. Yes, the people here were beautiful no less than in my own Albertville. But here the beauty was not amidst the jungle, no, but was the jungle itself, a jungle of people of all colours and shapes and varieties and sizes, and the long lines of beauty never did end. And my friend was beautiful, though I found him odd.

I marvelled at his appearance. He stood higher than me by a foot, and wore a fine silken beard, black and lovely. He reminded me of a picture of Jesus Christ I have seen, which proved to be ironic; the more so because he wore a strange costume, leaving me to wonder from what country he came. It was a long skirt, a gown, which fell to his ankles, and was tied at his waist by a brown belt, the gown itself shining and rather tight upon him, perhaps grey but perhaps only soiled. I saw a peculiar paleness in the eyes of this man; there was a wanness at his eyes. But beneath them, were strapped two purplish sacs, and these reflected some light back into the soft

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pale eyes, which I say were the eyes of a poet. Such a man was exceptional to see, yes, and not only for me; because I was not the only one to stop to gaze upon him and the large sign he carried on which were these large words :

CHRIST IS COMING

Even his voice was beautiful and strong, not of the awesome sonority and power of that dead M. Three, but a voice like music, I say, as I listened to it. This is what that man, a theologian, was saying: 'Christ is coming, neighbour, Jesus is coming. Are you a Christian today? He means to know, brother, if you're a Christian or not, for He is salvation, that is His name, and when He has come, and has been here, and has passed on, you will have been judged. Are you a Christian today? Are you prepared to look back into His eyes of fire?' This beautiful man had begun to look straight at me so that I smiled at his extraordinary face. 'You may smile today, black brother, but tomorrow He will stand where I am standing. Will you smile at Jesus tomorrow?'

'No, no,' I could not stop smiling, for his eyes flashed like distant stars, 'you are a theologian, I know, and I smile with respect. You are surely beautiful, and I smile with pleasure.'

'Do not extol *my* miserable body, brother!' said the theologian. 'Do not call *me* beautiful, for when you see *Him* you shall fall in ecstasy at his toes, in each one of which you will find more beauty than in the thousand stars and moons which are prepared to careen and explode at world's end.'

'Oh,' I said, 'I think your preaching says that you are the reflection of your god, and perhaps he is not selfish and did not make himself more lovely than his sons. Don't you think so?'

I thought it was a mild thing to say, but that theologian gnashed his teeth and groaned, 'It grieves my sinews themselves to be thus compared to the God and the Saviour of men. All other beauty than His is tainted, defiled by the flesh. Oh, your words are not Christian, brother, and that is the sore truth, however humble your intent.'

Well, then, these words ennobled the man, M. Dysnas by name; but they did not seem so ennobling to me, who has seen

the leprosy of the mind which follows upon man's want of conviction in himself; at such things I grew angry, and what I said was this: 'All that is beauty is, to me, everything, theologian. This is what I have observed. Do you speak of defiled flesh in the sons of your god? Oh, I tell you your god would weep! Please, look, see,' I gestured to a lady who stood next to me and noticed how embarrassed she grew, she pulled back, but beauty I say is to gaze at, 'look at this woman, theologian, and tell me where is the taint, the defilement. You cannot. I do not see it. I say she is forty years old—not yet, lady?—but each year has put a beauty into her green eyes which was not there the year before. Ah, ah! you notice now that this up-turned nose is jolly, the chin strong and determined. Too late! Here is a woman, a stranger to me and to you, theologian; these high cheeks, this long resolute chin, they are surely ready to face your god, let him stand here now, this moment. Do you understand me?'

'Neighbour,' said the theologian and he put his own fingers to the heavy frown which he put upon me, 'your argument is ingenious. It is crafty. But the devil is in the flesh. Whereas Christ our Lord has no use for the flesh.'

I was impatient. 'Where ther is beauty to please our eyes more than in the flesh? Oh, and besides, theologian, I do not judge by true knowledge, but still I know that your god was crucified in the flesh. Do not fear it. Beauty is a godlike thing, and flesh is beautiful enough,' and there was something in the widening smiles of those about us to irritate me further; as M. Dysmas had felt I smiled at him, now did I feel there were some here who found it ridiculous in me to argue with the theologian, but I went on: 'As for me, I do not hand to you now the words of another, as you pick them up and pass them out upon this corner, but offer to you the genuine consolation of my humble intelligence. You are beautiful, these who smile about us are beautiful, and as for your god, theologian, hear me: he is not coming, you poor man of secret beauty, you theologian, for he is here. Yes! Here! Now!'

I meant to say no more, for between ridicule and the fullness my heart feels when I speak of man's self-bereavement, I had

begun to fear that this city was too friendly, and filled with snares for the too willing; and my heart was too full and jealous that evening, anyway, full with the young anciency of my people who were suffering, jealous with the ancient youngness of this New York with its abundance, abundance, abundance: abundance of energy, might, any small part of which might have meant renewal for my people. That here, upon this richest star, I should find unhappy people in need of the consolation of the miserable, it was grief to me, and I say this now to explain that there were a few tears of anger and remorse to stop my eyes as I spoke. And then, strangely, that man's eyes seemed, through my tears, to burn with lavender sulphur. This odd thing happened: he slowly, very slowly, as if lowering himself by a rope, prostrated himself and his placard upon the pavement. I could not think of his meaning. He put his face to that placard and kissed it and having done this, which I say was ample demonstration of humility for any man, he stayed upon his knees to set his cheek upon my shoes and there he began a soft mumbling by which I could not but be moved, though I could not make any of it out.

Those about us appeared shocked. I was myself terribly shocked. The others moved off but I could not, for the theologian had his long fingers locked clutching at my ankles.

'Please, please,' I implored of him, tugging upon the man's tunic, but it fitted him tightly, so that I could not get a grasp on it. 'Please do stand up now!'

He finally carried himself back to his feet, as slowly as he had left them, standing over me so that I saw they were *his* eyes now wet with tears, and the tears spun down his cheeks to the very edges of his quivering mouth. 'When,' he asked me then, hoarsely, 'did you arrive?'

'I? Why, only a short time ago,' I answered. 'Now, be cheerful. I, too, will be more cheerful, and say you should forgive my anger and tone,' and I determined now to change the topic at once: 'I am so excited by your city.'

'It can't be!'

'Oh, it overwhelms me,' I tried to encourage him about it.

'A man who does not see his own beauty perhaps does not always see the beauty about him. I am overwhelmed.'

'Yes,' he tearfully answered, and in a moment his face opened to such a sudden cheerfulness and joy, and he cried: 'Faith! Why, I've been sinful of eye, not seeing the resplendence in the things gathered about me. Faith! Oh, the city shines! Forgive me!' He was a strange man, whose excitement now was rapturous.

'It is not for me to forgive you, M. Theologian. I think you can do that for yourself. And now—'

'I forgive me!' he cried, interrupting me, his hands together on his breast. 'I forgive me with all my heart. My heart is yours.' He glanced around with eager happiness, almost like a young animal, wiping his eyes free of their tears. 'Beautiful! Oh Lord, how beautiful! I see it now! New York, New York, New York, you are beautiful!' And then he grabbed hold of my hands. 'What must I do? Tell me what to do!'

But one intrusion into my time such as this kept me from wishing it to be delayed by more length. 'I cannot know what you should do, my friend.' I shook my head, astonished by his confusion. 'I have myself so much to do.'

'What will you do? Can you tell me?'

'I must see the Secretary-General of the United Nations.' I confessed.

'I will help you.'

'Is it true?' I asked, my astonishment leaping straightway into hope. 'You can help me?'

'With my body, my heart and my soul can I,' he assured me.

'Then I am grateful to you, and amazed at my good luck. May I know your name?'

He was thoughtful. 'Call me Dysmas,' he said deeply, then, 'for I am penitent.'

'Very well. And now, M. Dysmas, I say I am lucky to have found you, for it reminds me of the work I must do. I am ashamed to have to tell you that I am required to move with haste and would like to see the Secretary-General as soon as possible. Do you think you can help me to him quickly, my friend?'

'We will march!' announced M. Dysmas, freeing my hand and sweeping down to take up his placard.

I put my hand upon his arm. 'It is not poor diplomacy to take him from his bed? Perhaps he has retired already?' He examined his placard, then suddenly threw it aside, letting it fall with a sharp thud into the gutter. 'Truly, many depend upon me to hurry and I am willing to see him at once.'

'It is surely as thou sayest,' nodded my friend. 'I wonder, Lord, if we might—'

'No, no,' I corrected him, 'we have no title in my country such as *Lord*. For myself the title is *Premier*.'

'It is true.'

'That is your name?'

'No, no, not my name.'

'Forgive me, forgive me,' he said softly, turning his head down and nearly tucking it beneath his beard. 'What then should I call you? Do not let me offend you. What shall I say?'

'Call me Adumbaba,' I told him, smiling at this man's natural humility, pleased at having found a man to try to help me in my mission.

'Adumbaba,' he repeated carefully. He picked up his head. 'What does it mean?'

'It is my name.'

'Indeed, is it?'

'It is the only name I know, surely.'

He shook his head, this theologian. He mused: 'It is the word. I now have the word. And the word is Adumbaba.'

But while he was directing me, as he said, to the United Nations Building, and we moved down that bright, quick Forty-second Street, M. Dysmas said to me:

'About one thing I am mystified. Adumbaba, you are black. Why is that?'

I could not understand such a question. 'I have always been black.'

'Is that truly true?'

'I have always been black,' I told him again.

'And yet, I have never heard it said.'

'I thought all who knew of me knew that as well,' I said, thinking now he was mistaking me for some other Premier.

'Man is out of touch with you, Adumbaba.'

Well, I did not understand that so much, either, but I know theologians speak often in phrases which have no meaning beyond their simple beauty and so seem they poets, and I have said that this man's eyes were the eyes of a poet. To poets we must sometimes listen without comment, perhaps.

2 THE ASCENSION

What I believed about M. Dysmas was that he was a man with a good heart and with friendly willingness and with knowledge of the ways of his city, so that he could open doors and offer me help in approaching the Secretary-General, and in such help, I hoped, there would be substance.

I admire that friend and his enthusiasm though the substance was somewhat liquid. He could take me to the United Nations Building but had no more ability than myself to pass through its gates. The guard at one gate, the only one just then open, suggested we return the next day and use that entrance meant for visitors to the building, and my stressing the urgency of my business did not at all impress him; he was frank to say he doubted that my business would suffer by the delay. M. Dysmas was furious.

'Do you know the name before which you stand?' shouted he at that guard.

The guard only grinned and professed to no interest in learning of my name or station.

M. Dysmas led me in a walk about and along much of the high fence enclosing the grounds of the United Nations, and we came to a gate looking into a dark little park of lawns to one side of the building, but the gate was locked and impassable. We could see that, in the building itself, many lights were bright and M. Dysmas informed me that he believed one of these lights shined upon the Secretary-General himself, who lived in the building as well as worked in it. This news

did not appear to be any help to me, but that new friend of mine would not surrender, announcing to me that, 'I will prove myself to you, Adumbaba!'

We therefore walked about some while longer, when M. Dysmas all at once perceived that the attention of the guard at the first gate we visited was distracted a short distance from that gate; and my friend could not wait for me to observe this for myself, preferring at once to pull me into the yawning jaws he had discovered. This he did so mightily and unexpectedly that I went after him nearly without touching the ground; and quite soon I found myself crouching beside an automobile inside the United Nations grounds.

'Now, this is not diplomatic,' I protested in a harsh whisper.

'Trust me, Adumbaba,' he whispered. 'Let me prove myself.'

We crept from car to car through the parking section and then followed in the shadow of the building itself until we had stolen all the way around to the other side of the tower, where the colder wind from the river blew straight in upon us. But we could not get into the building. There was no door that would let us in.

'It is useless,' I said.

M. Dysmas considered my view, then said, 'Adumbaba, I see that it is your desire to mount this building. I am unafraid.'

'What do you tell me?' I asked.

'I will give you a boost.'

'Ah, no! no!' I crouched now in his own shadow. 'Gods, no; the building seems to be made of glass.'

'I was a tumbler in my youth, Adumbaba, and am unafraid,' and he smiled confidently, placing one sturdy arm about my waist, 'for I have a theory that obstacles are meant to be tumbled up and tumbled over,' and that fearless man proceeded to describe to me how we might hop our way up this glass building, and next, while I tried giddily to evaluate his plan, he finished: 'Like this, Adumbaba! See!'

And he had taken me, had M. Dysmas, like a ball, and gave me a hefty toss up and high above his shoulders so that I caught grasping at some lucky indenture many feet up along that building without knowing or caring what kind of an

indenture it might be, but this I knew: if this indenture which admittedly left me hovering above the ground, my feet dangling yet higher than the shoulders of M. Dysmas, provided positive proof of the scalability of the United Nations Building, the proof was not enough. 'Yes, yes,' I said, 'I see, and now help me down, M. Dysmas, I beg you,' but already he made my difficulty in merely hanging there more arduous and even painful by using my body as a momentary ladder up which he leaped with agility, surpassing my brief height and, I swear, he actually did appear to be tumbling his way up the face of glass. He was now above me by about the distance that I had been above him; that is, his feet were somewhere close upon my shoulders.

'Adumbaba! Take hold of my leg and climb right up me! I will be proud,' and seeing that his feet stretched within reach, I chose them in preference to the narrow filing which was threatening to destroy my fingers and my mind, and by his feet did I cling to him.

'Climb, Adumbaba, climb!' he cried softly, hoarsely, in a moment. 'You're just hanging on.'

'I cannot do it this way,' I told him, already afraid to look down. 'Please, my friend, tell me how to safely drop to the ground.'

'Adumbaba!' he would not even let me relax and firm myself, but had to advise me: 'Don't hold my legs so tightly. I can't move.'

I wondered whether I should drop or make myself more comfortable where I was and at length shifted my anxiety slowly to one dress-draped leg, freeing the other, and then managed to get myself up a small way so that I could get my arms about his hips, whereupon I found his skirt too close and smooth, slippery, and I began to slide down again and nearly dropped off him, catching at his feet and then, as he began jerking, scurrying up his legs, which themselves were slippery and hairless, finding myself now within his skirt and all I could find to hold on to in there set him to moaning dreadfully.

'Lord, Lord, no!' he cried mutedly.

'Take me down,' I implored him, holding tight.

'Oh, Lord, God, Adumbaba, free me from that!'

And I felt him rapidly and spasmodically moving in this direction and in that direction, in some direction, in any direction, and I dared not look to see in what directions, for I was sure most of them were up, and he moaned the whole way. I do not know how long we climbed and moaned but it seemed half the night had passed and surely we should have been to the top of the building.

At last I heard him say, 'I'm coming to a window with a light in it, I believe, Adumbaba!'

'Knock, for the love of your god, knock,' I cried, 'and go easy with your legs, sir, I beg you; you're kicking terribly! Can you see into the window?'

'I can!'

'Is it open?'

'It is, it truly is! Oh my God, it hurts!'

'Go in, go in!'

There's a woman in there, Adumbaba!'

How shocked and frightened she would be to see men come out of the heavens like this, I thought. 'Madam,' I called out loudly, 'do not be frightened!'

'Lord, Lord,' M. Dysmas moaned. 'You scared her that time.'

'Madam!' I called. 'We come on truly urgent business,' but my words were interrupted by such a piercing scream that I nearly let go of M. Dysmas.

'Lord, look at her howl,' moaned M. Dysmas. 'Oh, *why* do you forsake me!'

'Has she run away?'

'She only stands there, Adumbaba, holding on to her broom so tight that the very sight of it hurts. Can't you hear her howl?'

'Go in, go in! I'm losing my sense!'

Slowly, then, yes, and to my most delicious relief, was I hauled into that lighted room and allowed to fall wonderfully resounding upon a hard floor, a fall of a mere foot against a

floor which supported me as if it were the pavement itself. What simple wonders nature works, how many are the devices of the gods, who support us upon solid ground day upon day and hour upon hour without once receiving the thanks of their children.

As for the woman who waited to greet us, she was a washing woman of some sort, and too frightened to move or speak, she could only stare at us: I, waiting for my strength and senses to revive, M. Dysmas panting and moaning still, and pulling and scratching at his long beard.

'Certainly,' I was at last able to speak to the lady, 'we owe you an explanation,' and I got to my feet, noticing that I was in an office which was wide and bright and contained many desks. 'Please believe I must see the Secretary-General, who lives within some high storey such as this. To what floor have we come? Where must we go?'

The woman had not yet blinked once. She said in a monotone to me, 'This is the third floor.'

'The thirtieth floor, you tell us?'

'The third,' she said, 'Number Three,' leaving me to wonder that the mere third floor of this topless tower should be at least five hundred feet above the pavement. 'There's no Secretary-General *here*,' she added, sounding as if she had never heard of such a man or title.

But either from fear of us, or that kind of sophistication born of her work among such world notables, she collected herself and soon guided us to a workers' elevator, that we might continue our search for ourselves. After she taught us to manipulate that elevator, we elected to ascend so high as floor thirty-five, there to begin a floor-by-floor search for the apartment of the Secretary-General. That woman showed us how to take that elevator to the floor we named, and how to stop it, and how to open the doors. And then, like a terrified sigh rushing from some threatened throat, she showed us how to instantly vanish.

I, with M. Dysmas, closed the elevator doors and soon we were lifted with deathly speed to the tenth, fifteenth, twentieth, twenty-fifth storeys and we slowed the elevator too quickly,

and then were shot up to the twenty-seventh, where we accidentally stopped entirely; and in spurts thereafter we took ourselves up to the thirty-fifth floor.

We opened the doors.

Waiting for us in that wide corridor were many guards, and all of them had pistols or rifles pointed directly at us. I have, therefore, noticed this thing about war: that when a war will come, and must be fought, and a man is part of it, he may run the circle of the world, but still the war will stay with him. He must fight it until it is won or he is lost.

M. Dysmas, I might add to this, did not raise his hands so promptly as I myself did, and needed the prodding of a rifle. He laughed at the rifle as if it tickled him, and looked at me as if I, too, might have the spirit to laugh. Seeing, however, that my hands were raised unconfidently, he decided to lift his own; but still he smiled bravely. So dauntless was he!

Indeed, he smiled as we were searched and as I had my belongings removed from me, both my money and papers and also the pistol of M. Three which I still had. He smiled as we were taken back down that elevator. He smiled yet as we were shoved uncordially into a long black automobile. He did not stop smiling even as we were driven, sirens laughing madly, away from the United Nations Building.

3 WARD 7

M. Dysmas had been administered a mild drug. This was because he had become aware that he was in a magnificent hospital, a radiant hospital of endless spotless hallways.

One such hospital in Albertville would pay for itself in regained lives each day. At first I almost did not regret being there, thinking it less serious to be in trouble with doctors than with police; but as for M. Dysmas, he needed only to see that the police car had acted as an ambulance to become so upset that it nearly seemed he must have been familiar with these halls already. Not only had he been given the mild sedative, but he had also been trussed up in a jacket whose long arms,

being twisted about the whole of him and then locked, left him helpless. Still, with drug and jacket fighting him, he struggled, but he was stupefied somewhat and became quiet in a bit.

I, too, was in bonds, in a jacket of the same sort, though I had not struggled at all. Perhaps it was because of my association with M. Dysmas. By his bed was I lain, and we were again neighbours, and I listened to his occasional moans, they distracting me from the moanings of my own heart. 'He is coming,' moaned M. Dysmas, and my thoughts were with Albertville and M. Rodriq, who seemed once again to smirk upon Adumbaba the prisoner. 'He is coming,' moaned my friend, 'and God help you, brother, when he judges you, for he will take you by the core and hang there and test you till you're fair detested.'

I turned to the bed next to mine on the other side, and saw upon it, sitting free of a jacket, a man with a long curling moustache and a face I will call feline, the dark eyes narrow and dark and quick and intense, the nose long and slender, the mouth pink and expressive; and as I look at him he looks back at me and thins his eyes and points his nose at me and asks in a whisper made of gravel: 'Molotov?'

'My name?' I said. 'It is Adumbaba.'

'And what is it? What do you want?'

'No, nothing; excuse me. I should not stare,' and I turned away.

Soon the man recalled my attention with a, 'Ssst! I will tell you now. The Mensheviks have got us.'

I stared at him again. 'The Mensheviks?'

'You don't know? Listen, then: I will have Beria pay you a hundred thousand rubles if you will get me to Moscow. It's the doctors again; they've got me again. I must escape.'

But even I knew more of history than this and said to him, 'Oh, my poor man, Beria is dead.'

It was piteous. That man's eyes seemed to die before me. Those dead eyes were buried in tears. He clenched his fists and turned from me and fell into a quiet sobbing.

I began to look around the ward in which we were placed. It was massive. I do not know how many beds were in it, but

nearly all of them were occupied. It would be much more difficult in all of Badosh to find enough madmen to fill such a massive room, but in New York these men were located, and perhaps they had reserved another room for women.

The lights were on and too brilliant. It was not yet to that hour when they were turned out, clearly, and though many of those inmates lay still on their beds, nor was the man appearing to think himself Josef Stalin the only man to weep, many others sat up, staring or chatting or laughing to themselves. One man got up on his bed and stood there gazing about and after a time his gaze dropped upon me.

'Darius!' cried he. 'Darius! *Wah!* you black pig, see me! It is I, Cambyses! Do you see me? Do you see my sword?'

I tried not to look at that man. Another man helped divert my attention from M. Cambyses by leaving his bed to stroll slowly, stiffly, up to mine.

'Not enough fire in the eyes,' he told me in a moment. 'You look practically sane.'

I let an uncomfortable grunt be my answer; in truth, I was then wondering about my own sanity.

'I'm kind of sane, too,' he told me. 'The others are pretty bad off. Who are you?'

'Adumbaba.'

'That's your name?'

I nodded from my pillow.

'Why'd they bring you?'

'I was climbing up the United Nations Building, you see.' The man looked upon me warily and then I had to smile. 'Yes, it is strange. I cannot blame them for suspecting this is the place for me.'

'Why did you do it?'

'To see the Secretary-General about the petition of my people for independence.'

'What people?'

'The people of Badosh. I am Pernin Adumbaba, Premier of Badosh.'

That man kept his eyes on me for just another moment and

then slowly, stiffly, went away, seeming disappointed, as if he had hoped to find someone he might talk to.

I could not think long about him, for another man hurried over to me and said, 'I heard what you told that fool, Mr. Premier. He didn't believe you.'

'And you do believe me?' I asked him.

'I do not doubt,' he told me. 'I succour.'

'What does it mean? How do you do that thing?'

'I am a knight, Mr. Premier. I am Don Quixote de la Mancha. I help people.'

'Ah, I see. I wish you could help me.'

'I don't dare. I have made too many enemies already while helping ungrateful people. That is why I am here. Too many enemies. They gathered against me and took me by force. It would take all night to tell you the names of those enemies who came against me.'

'Perhaps,' I said, closing my eyes, 'it would take less time to tell me the names of your friends.' I looked upon him without interest.

'Ah, friends,' sighed that man, blinking his small blue eyes and taking hold of one of his long eyebrows and twisting it. 'Friends are not so easy to find as enemies, and as busy as I have been, I have not had time for the harder course. Yes indeed, in my time, Sir, I have been besieged from the floors of all the Parliaments of the world; I wonder—have you ever besieged me in Badosh? I should like to add your name to the list. The glorious list. Ah, I have been the blue subject of black whitepapers; malignment is my history. They managed to put me here but, bless me, it took all of them to do it. I gave them a round battle. I drew blood!' He peered at me closely then; I felt his breath. 'Do you believe me?'

I did not have the heart, no, not even the courteous interest, to say I did not.

In the course of that evening, I met many men whose names, even when—as in the case of Don Quixote de la Mancha—I did not understand them, I somehow perceived were of significance. It seemed I had left the United Nations to come to the one place in New York where I might be introduced to a still

more glamorous staff. Yes, here there were Brutus (a man with the most exaggerated sense of his own guilt), Julius Caesar (who seldom took his dubious, large, sad, accusing eyes from Brutus), Frederick the Great, Alexander the Great, Charles the Great, Peter the Great, Ivan the Terrible, Cambyses (who constantly mumbled of his need, if he didn't shout it, for a strong bow, a straight arrow and one small boy, that he might prove his sanity thrice in two-thirds of a trice), Isolde (a strange man who annoyed me for his high-pitched woeful mutterings of, 'It is black, black, black'), and the man I have spoken of who was Josef Stalin, and there were Genghis Khan, Adolf Hitler, John Wilkes Booth, Lord Byron, Jefferson Davis, as well as a midget who seemed unable to decide between Heinrich Himmler (whom he generally favoured) and Rasputin, but whose personality was unpleasant in either form. I say I was in outstanding company. Being myself a Premier, I was at least accepted, although not as enthusiastically as had I been a Napoleon.

I had to converse briefly with some of these eminent figures and I listened to M. Dysmas throw his lonely shafts of half-conscious defiance in whatever direction they would go, and a short time passed. Once again, as if noticing that, whatever I claimed to be, I at least neither gave myself to giggles, screams, tears or any other seizures, that man who told me he was sane at last returned to me.

'Well?' he asked rather self-consciously. 'What do you think of our group?'

'Just now,' I admitted, 'I cannot think too well.'

'I tried to kill myself,' he announced momentarily, though I had asked him nothing.

'Ah, I see.' I was saying to myself: Let him not speak to me of his trouble, I do not care about it.

'A certain woman,' he said; yes, he wanted to talk as badly as the others wanted to talk. I began to feel the room was filled with people who wanted to talk, that perhaps the world was filled with people who wanted to talk. In this room, it was easier to talk, perhaps, but I did not know why. 'My wife.'

'Well, I am sorry.'

'I'm a teacher. Teachers shouldn't marry. You know? Women like their mattresses stuffed with money, not history.' And so he wanted to talk. 'You don't give a damn, do you?'

'Well,' I blinked and then thought to say: 'And what do you teach, then? History?'

'Literature.'

'Books?'

'Yes. At a high school.'

'You are a good teacher?'

He blinked now and said, 'I suppose so.'

'But perhaps this has nothing to do with your terror of life?'

'Terror of life,' he repeated, and for the first time he smiled. 'I guess may be it does. A teacher doesn't make money. And then, you can't teach literature honestly these days, and that hurts with a kind of pain no woman could stop to understand. She says, live in muck! It's okay by her.'

I shook my head. 'I am sorry. I cannot understand you.'

'Oh,' he bit at that word angrily, seating himself upon my bed and not looking upon my bonds; so that we might have been speaking in much more normal circumstances, 'oh, it's just that we can't,' he closed his eyes and opened them and held his mouth ready to speak; i could not tell whether it was difficult to speak the words he felt, or whether he could not find them.

'Why are you not in such a jacket like mine?' I asked.

'Oh, I've been here a few days now. I guess they're satisfied I won't try it again for a while. That doesn't mean I can walk out, though. I'm not rich.'

'Ah, I see.'

He shrugged. Suddenly he was able to talk: 'We never could have the home she wanted; couldn't even afford a baby, not to bring up the way she wanted; and she had to budget things so—oh, it's just *her*; she wants *more*. You understand? I've had a tough time holding on to this one job, I mean if I still have a job which I guess I don't; but I was always in trouble. You know? I'd be talking to students about William Blake or John Donne or Walt Whitman, you know? You know? And suddenly, they're controversial. If I speak of Robin Hood, I

find out Robin Hood has been removed from the school's library. Turns out he was pink all along. And I'm left in the john with little, if you understand.'

'Robin Hood?'

'And Chaucer and Milton and Whitman and some of Shakespeare and Louisa May Alcott. Her, she got acquitted in Moscow, so that condemned her upstate. You know? So once I got suspended and that started me fighting with the school, my wife, the world, and then I got cleared and all, but things got so bad I tried to kill myself once before. That's the thing. You know? That's it: this is my second time. In jail, they say you have to be a three time loser. But in Ward Seven, the second time does it. You know? They'll put me away. Sure they will; it's not as if I had money. If you have money, you can buy the doctors in a pill parlour like this; you could jump off a building every night and they'd have an ambulance waiting to taxi you home if you didn't get killed. You know? My God,' he spoke more thickly, no longer looking at me, 'they're going to put me away. Sure. I wish I'd killed myself.'

I could still not think what to say to this man. 'Do you want to die, then?'

'Of course not!' he said madly. 'Christ!'

'Yes, yes,' moaned my friend, M. Dysmas. 'You have seen him.'

Soon I said, 'I wish I could help you.'

He stood up, then; embarrassed. 'I shouldn't have bothered you.'

'But,' I told him, 'you should not want to die. People who defeat themselves defeat all men. You have not such a right.'

He looked at me disgustedly only, I believe, then walked away from me. I felt badly for such a man, but my bad feelings were so confused and compounded in my heart and mind that I could not single out my feeling of sorrow for him from the general sorrow which, more tightly than that rubber jacket, constricted my heart and lungs.

It was about that time that M. Cambyes began to make war-cries, and nothing I have heard in those tribes of Badosh most distant from Albertville could equal the throaty screams

of M. Cambyeses, which stopped my breath entirely, and which I cannot transliterate even through such letters as:

'Ooo-ooo-ooo-ah-ah-ah-wah-wah-wah-AHeeAHeeAHee-WA HWAHWAHWAHWAH!'

He frightened many people thus, and I was one of them, and it was awful to see that man dance up and down upon his bed as he made such sounds. In the jungle, I say, there may be some joy in nature which will mingle with this sort of overt expression; but in a bed in a room in a New York City, even a hospital room, it is awful.

Soon a male nurse, oh, a truck of a man, came rolling into the room and, without trying to comfort the bedevilled and excited M. Cambyeses, he gave him a terrible knocking below the knees, and the war-crier fell to the bed, where he was quickly subdued and trussed even as was I, in such a jacket. M. Cambyeses war-cried awfully, then, and the male nurse slapped at his face. Some one or two objected to this treatment, perhaps reflecting it back upon themselves (for our condition was at least similar, if only physically, to the condition of M. Cambyeses, and it is not pleasant for a man to know that a mistake he makes may bring such a mercilessly muscular retribution to bear, fists pounding).

The male nurse cursed and threatened those who complained and told everyone to be still, else they should regret it.

One of the complainers was that man who claimed sanity, the teacher, who I heard say, 'They put him in a jacket and let the moping melancholics run loose.'

The male nurse moved slowly, menacingly, towards the bed of that teacher. 'Hey,' he grumbled lowly, 'you should just shut up, two-timer. You ain't going no place, and ain't no one going to care if you get the treatment. Hey, you think about that.'

'What is the treatment?' I asked quietly, turning to Josef Stalin, but that was pointless, for he was staring in horror at the male nurse and beneath his moustache his lips moved without making words.

'The treatment,' said that male nurse, for he heard me and turned grinning upon me, 'that's what I choose to make it. Maybe electric shock. Right through the skull, Mister. Right

into the brain. That's to make sure our patients behave like patients, Blackie. Electric shock. That's right; *me*, I can put you to that. And more.'

I hated that man at once. 'You lie. You cannot have permission to do such a thing. Are you a doctor?'

'I'm all the doctor you're liable to see for a while if you ain't behaving, Blackie. Hey, maybe you're looking for the treatment yourself?' He saw my hatred.

And now M. Dysmas came awake, for he opened his eyes on that male nurse who hung close by us and he said, 'Don't!' most emphatically. 'Don't speak another word, goat-child of Mammon, son of the succubus, on pain of the most cruel religion he, I and heaven will exact of you in a near hour!' His voice shook with rage.

'Bastard,' muttered that teacher, then, when to my helpless fury the male nurse turned back upon the teacher and marched to his bed, there slapping his hand across the teacher's face; and such a sound was nearly as loud and just as awful as the war-cries of M. Cambyeses.

'Gods!' I cried now, for after all there was no stilling myself, and it was too much. 'Don't! That man is in a hospital. Yes? then if he is well, release him, and if he is sick, cure him!' But my heart boiled and reached into my throat and I spit towards the male nurse but, of course, could not reach him. 'I will report you!'

The male nurse approached my bed and, I say frankly, I knew some hurried regret for having expressed myself, but just then the doors to this massive room bounced open cheerfully and a most cheerful, most happy, most grinning doctor strode into the room, running his pink hand over his greying short-cropped hair, and his voice was as sunny as his entrance to us, he was a songbird chirruping:

'Well, well, well, well, everyone locked up this evening? No? Not yet? Ah, Comrade Stalin, you've not eaten your dinner; that's what I was told; but you can't have borsch every night, can you? Now, now, now, now, *now*, Mr. Doyle,' and he was speaking to that teacher, 'what a face, what a long red face, longer than Don Quixote's, isn't it? Don't be so discouraged.

Tomorrow morning the sun will rise; if it doesn't, we'll turn the heat on. We look for optimism in you. Adjustment is a happy thing. Ah then, here is good news for you, Mr. Doyle: your wife is in New York and is coming to visit you. Therefore, we're letting you stay up past bed-time tonight. You see? Be optimistic! There's always a sun going to shine. People *do* live happily ever after. Come on, smile, now, eh? One good smile for being alive, and make it a little wider for your wife. No?"

'I won't see her,' muttered M. Doyle, the teacher, looking away.

'Doctor!' I began.

'Ah,' he pointed his smile at me and came to stand beside the male nurse, who had by then ambled about to place himself between my bed and Josef Stalin's. 'A new member.'

'I must tell you, now,' I said to that doctor, 'that this man beside you is not competent to be in charge of this unhappy place, for here the most evil bacteria, Sir, is grief itself; and he festers it.'

'Oh, my,' the doctor frowned such a small frown for me. 'I'm sorry to hear that. I really am. Well, we'll have to do something about that, won't we?'

'Only a moment before you came in,' I told him, 'this animal struck M. Doyle. Yes! He hit him viciously!'

'He hit Mr. Doyle? Well, we don't want fighting in here, do we? No, it's against the rules. Well, I'll have to scold the nurse, won't I? My goodness,' he looked across my bed to M. Dysmas, 'what a fine beard. That's a fine one. Lovely. Are you happy with it? Let's see, you would be . . . Mr. Dysmas. Is that right?'

'Jabbering Judas,' mumbled M. Dysmas, for reproaches did not soften his anger.

'Well, now,' said the doctor. 'That's not so awfully friendly.'

'Doctor,' I tried to speak again, 'I cannot think you have heard me. I say to you, this man beside you struck M. Doyle painfully hard.'

'Well,' he smiled back at me, 'didn't I tell you I would . . . well, well, well, all right, then; nurse, did you hit Mr. Doyle?'

'Sorry, Doctor,' that male nurse spoke softly. 'He was a little hysterical.'

'Oh, my,' the doctor glanced back at M. Doyle. 'But you didn't hit him hard.'

'I just woke him up a little,' said the nurse.

'You lie!' I yelled.

The doctor lifted his hand, and then smiled. 'It was his hand, now, and he says he didn't hit Mr. Doyle too hard.'

That doctor was turning all my sorrow to rage, and I thundered at him, 'He lies! He is brutal, a swine, a beast!' I cared nothing for the thinning eyes of the male nurse which studied me more dark than my skin.

'You don't speak very calmly, do you?' the doctor asked of me. His smile disappeared between two tight lips.

'And he called me *Blackie*!' I added, but then felt shame to have admitted that this so bothered me.

'That was perhaps inconsiderate,' and the doctor now seemed to decide this was the whole cause of my anger. He looked at me. 'Still and all, you are black. You must accept this.'

'I know I am black! You idiot!'

'Then why do you object to being called *blackie*?'

It was just then M. Dysmas began a moaning and a groaning which mounted quickly and, with an effort and an energy I cannot understand (for I have been within such a jacket), he stretched inside that jacket and then, making an explosion which seemed to begin at his heart, he burst out of that jacket and at once leaped out of his bed; he ran for both the male nurse and the doctor, that latter man backing away with graceful self-protection, but the former man accepted the challenge. Oh, he should not have accepted M. Dysmas's challenge, who in his fit took him by the broad neck and sent him running quite comically across the ward and that nurse could not stop but kept going and ran through the doors and we heard him fall down out in the corridor with a wonderful thump of a fall.

The doctor tried to scramble away, but this M. Dysmas scrambled also. I called out to my friend to stop, but no, he lifted the doctor and hurled him after his nurse, and that doctor

dropped flatly upon the floor and went sliding out of the door like a man sliding down a muddy hill.

The room went wild with applause for the feat of M. Dysmas; it seemed that something more electric than the male nurse's threatened electric shock plucked them from their borrowed personalities for some few moments, so that even Josef Stalin sat up to clap, his eyes for those moments filled with a softer, more human life. I was amazed. But the anti-delusion did not survive, for they not only shortly retired into their magnificent newer personalities, they also lent a new one to M. Dysmas, who they now proclaimed to be: '*Samson! Samson! Samson!*' And they set up a wonderful cheering for him.

That, too, was not of duration, for a little army of male nurse tanks all at once advanced through the doors, and my friend M. Dysmas set himself solidly before that artillery (now, I noticed that not one other of the room's pitiable occupants had the courage to join him, even though they may have been unrestricted). They were too many, they were six or seven bulls against the one strapping theologian, and he fell beneath them and his struggles were useless. Not only was he given a new jacket, but he was tied to the bed within the jacket, chained there by broad woven ropes, and M. Dysmas, vanquished, closed his eyes and before long pleaded with me: 'Forgive me, Adumbaba! For I have failed.'

I could not comfort my friend. One of the male nurses had turned to me after securing M. Dysmas, and he began to unlock my jacket.

'Doc wants you,' he said, helping me quickly if clumsily from my jacket and my bed.

4 DIAGNOSES

In his small office I was greeted by that same doctor, that smiling doctor, that good-natured doctor with the pink flesh and close grey hair. Only a few minutes later, he seemed not to recall his recent humiliation.

He stood for me. 'Come, come, sit down won't you?' He even arose and helped me to find comfort in the single chair before his desk. 'Is your temper a little happier now? I hope so. Tell me you're feeling a little better.'

I nodded curtly. 'I feel fine, of course.'

'But you *complained*, didn't you?' He smiled and lifted his finger as if he had caught me at something unpleasant, then took to smiling at a pencil he played with.

'My complaint was a statement of disgust,' I told him soon.

'You feel a sense of disgust?' smiled the doctor.

'Yes, yes, I was disgusted at the sight of your nurse hitting your patient,' I said angrily, 'a patient who needs love and confidence, fearing you would treat him better were he rich. Don't you see?'

'Then I take it,' smiled the doctor, 'that Mr. Doyle is defensive? Upset?'

'Of course he is,' I frowned. 'Don't you know?'

'And tell me now,' smiled the doctor, 'what do you yourself think of his condition? What do you make of his accusations against Lowland Hospital?'

'His words are bitter,' I admitted and shrugged.

'Of course they aren't true,' smiled the doctor. 'In fact, this is a privately endowed institution, but we have kept our responsibilities public. Why else would you be here? In fact, we aren't so often visited by the wealthy. In rare emergencies, it might happen. Now tell me truly, my good fellow,' and he never once removed his smile from me, 'why were you caught climbing the United Nations Building? Foolhardy fun! You were drinking earlier, is that it?'

I tried to understand that doctor's questions and his purpose in seeing me. I had thought he meant to reprimand me for my attitude, but now he seemed so very friendly. And with his question, I had the idea that I should let him believe whatever he cared to believe, if only I could gain freedom for myself and M. Dysmas.

'Perhaps, now,' I could not look at the doctor directly, 'I did have a drink or two with my friend.'

'With your friend?'

'Yes, with M. Dysmas.'

'Ah, the great one. I see. Amiable alcoholism. Common enough.' He rather giggled, that cheerful doctor. 'I've done it myself, if you want the truth of it. But you know, the papers they found in your coat, and the amount of money you carried, and its nature, these have indicated to us that you might be a man of genuine responsibilities. You should know that they have informed high authorities of your presence here.'

With this information, I became much more cheerful, as he wished me to be. I would perhaps, at last now, face people of true authority. I could try to present to them my reasons for having to see the Secretary-General of the United Nations. 'This news is pleasing me,' I told him, nearly close upon a smile and trying to forget how little I was able to admire that man. 'I thank you.'

A female nurse had stepped into the office.

'Doctor,' she said, 'it's Mrs. J. J. Terwilliger Stanley. She's back.'

'Oh, iodine! Again?' the doctor said irritably. 'Very well.' He motioned the nurse out. 'You understand, of course, that our suspicions of your mental reliability do not cancel our obligation to examine you. It will take a few days.'

'A few days!' I exclaimed. 'Oh, but time pulls at me, and is precious. If you could—'

But then a small, nervous lady came toeing in with the aid of the female nurse, against whom she leaned, and the lady had that powdery excessive made-up look I had seen already in some streets of this city; a face cosmeticized to this degree: that it should replace youth and compliment a high but unbecoming style of dress. This lady wore a loose suit of a light blue, and a small close hat over her grey hair, and her eyes lurched over now and again, as if they were a bit heavy for her, and then she sent them back to the doctor, who widened his smile to greet her.

'Mrs. Stanley! Well, well, well, well,' he opened his arms and closed his hands, closed his arms and opened his hands, then snapped his fingers at me, saying lowly, 'Up, you, up! Let Mrs. Stanley sit down,' so that I shot from my chair. The

doctor proceeded to make her cosy in it.

'I prefer Doctor Prather,' said Mme Stanley in a thin voice which, for its softness, was timid, but in its timidity I heard a wiry insistence which was perhaps not accustomed to being denied.

'I was beginning to miss you,' smiled the doctor. 'Heavens, I haven't seen you for two months.'

'I want to go home,' said Mme Stanley, looking nervously about the room.

'Yes, yes,' said the doctor. 'I'm sure your husband must be on his way. The nurse makes it a practice to phone him the moment she sees you,' and he laughed. 'Well, I can't imagine what to do with you. Imagine! A little girl like you daring fate again. Again, Mrs. Stanley, again?'

'I want to go home,' said Mme Stanley, some bit louder.

'But Mrs. Stanley . . . forty,' the doctor moved a hand through some papers upon his desk and then looked up, smiling, 'yes, forty-two times now. Well, that's something of a record for Lowland Hospital, you know. What was it this time, Mrs. Stanley?'

'Pills,' said she. 'I'm tired and I want to go home.'

'Pills again,' the doctor shook his head, laughed cheerfully. 'Did they pump you out?'

The lady looked up at him through stricken eyes and her lips parted and she looked at the floor. 'You know I hate talking about that.'

'But you must be cleaned out,' smiled he.

'No, I won't talk about the insides of things,' said Mme Stanley firmly. 'Oh, if you insist upon having it told to you, they did it to me in the ambulance. Oh, these *boys*! I told them I might go through with the suit I began three years ago.'

'Now, now, now,' smiled the doctor through a roundness of lips, 'it was for your own good.'

'Let me go.'

'Of course, but do promise me you'll be careful with those things.'

'Where is Doctor Prather?'

'He's on vacation, my dear.'

'I prefer Doctor Prather.'

The doctor's smile weakened but he held on to it. 'I'm sorry,' he said softly.

'Oh, those rough boys who did it to me in the ambulance,' said Mme Stanley in a wide-eyed whisper. 'Awful . . . awful!'

'They were rough with you?' frowned the doctor.

'They didn't even ask my permission.'

'They were rough with you?' scowled the doctor.

'I want to go home,' said Mme Stanley.

'If they were rough with you, you may be sure they have lost their positions here, Mrs. Stanley.'

'Very well, they were rough with me.'

'We won't permit that to go unnoticed, Mrs. Stanley.'

'I'm going home,' she announced and that woman began to bob after the apple of perpendicularity, at last attaining some measure of it.

'But what shall I tell Mr. Terwilliger Stanley?' asked the doctor most unhappily, opening his two hands and showing three.

'Tell him to take some pills,' suggested Mme Stanley. 'Give me a cigarette.'

The doctor took a cigarette from a small box upon his desk and held his lighter for Mme Stanley, who shook the cigarette between her lips until it dropped through the flame. She turned to go.

'Now,' said the doctor, hurrying behind her, 'be careful, little girl.'

'I prefer Doctor Prather,' said she, looking about the corridor and finally selecting a direction.

'Goodbye, then,' called the doctor after her.

It took that doctor the better part of a moment to remember that I was still there, and to refix his smile into place, and as we both sat down he said: 'Now then, Mr . . . uh . . . '

But again we were interrupted by the female nurse.

The doctor's smile quite vanished and he snapped: 'What is it?'

'It's Mrs. Doyle.'

'Who? Yes, yes, yes, Mrs. Doyle, Well, I won't be long.'

'She's extremely upset,' said the nurse. 'She's trying to say something about being at fault with her husband; that she has to talk to him only through a medium or something, I'm not sure. She got a letter, Doctor, and feels that you were wrong to demand she see him herself.'

'I was wrong?' squealed the doctor in disbelief. 'I asked her to come tonight, and she has come, and she will talk to him. He is my patient, and I know what's good for him and, if she doesn't believe me, she can consult my astrologer.' He looked from his watch to the nurse. 'How did he send a letter?'

'I don't know, Doctor.'

'Well, I'll see her soon. Tell her to be patient.'

'I don't know if I can quiet her, though, Doctor. She says she didn't want to disobey you, but that her husband wrote he would kill himself before seeing her again.'

'Well, from the sound of her, I scarcely *blame* him!' frowned the doctor. 'However, tell her to be patient and without fear. After all, that letter was written by a nut. As soon as I finish with this man here, I'll see her.'

'She's making a scene, Doctor.'

'And you're making another; now, I said *soon*, therefore it will be *soon*!'

'Yes, Doctor,' and the nurse took herself away, closing the door after her.

The doctor shook his head. 'Sometimes the ones on the outside are harder to handle than the ones on the inside.' He looked up with a quick facsimile of his accustomed smile. 'You see how much trouble only one individual can cause here? You can't imagine how many hours must be spent upon just one ordinary man such as Mr. Doyle.'

'He is a lovely man,' I nodded. 'He is lonely and frightened. I hope you can help him.'

And now, still again, the door opened, and this time it was a handsome young woman there, whose hair was badly combed and whose brown coat was, I observed, buttoned incorrectly, so that one bottom corner hung higher than the other.

'Doctor,' she said, not letting herself be restrained by the

nurse behind her, 'I'm Mrs. Doyle. You must tell me: is he all right?'

'Of course,' the doctor said, now appearing to give up smiling altogether. 'If he wasn't all right, I would have written you myself. As it is, I am busy.'

'Please, please,' I said, standing once again, this time for Mme Doyle, but she did not sit down. 'I will wait.'

'It's my fault,' she stood grasping the edge of the doctor's desk. 'I blamed him for the rain, I blamed him for everything. I wanted to hurt him. I'm . . . I was . . . he thought I was unfaithful. I told him.'

'Why, he told us a different story than that,' the doctor said with a quizzical glance at the ceiling.

'Oh,' she said, 'it's many things. But you musn't make me see him; I mean, I have to talk to him, but you musn't make him think he has to see me. I don't know what he'll do. I got a letter. Herc,' she took it from her purse and pushed it at the doctor, who took it without opening it. 'He said he would kill himself once and for all if I tried to see him. But it's my fault. If I could make you believe that, because . . . I'm no good; yes, it's me you should have, not him.'

'Well, that's a healthy reaction,' the doctor nodded thoughtfully, whereupon I suspected this teaching in his trade: that the world is divided into two kinds of people, being those who are crazy and think they are not, and those who are not and think they are.

'He was so unhappy at school,' went on the distraught young woman, 'and I didn't help him, not ever. There wasn't money, and we fought, and then there was the trouble at the school, and . . . and then I pretended there was another man. I told him. I told him to torture him. I'm cruel! Cruel! Do you see how cruel I am?' She began to cry.

'My dear, my dear,' said the doctor, shaking his head and smiling and frowning together, 'have you seen your priest?'

'Please, please!' she said. 'Let him come home. Don't make me see him tonight, but tell him I respected his wishes and came even though I couldn't see him. Then let him come home. I can make him all right! I promise I can!'

'My dear,' said the doctor, 'what can I—'

'Or,' she interrupted, 'let me send a message to him but make him understand that he doesn't have to see me. But I must tell him,' she said through her sobbing, 'that I was cruel; that I lied. I have to talk to him without seeing him, that's what I mean! Only, let him come home! Please!'

'Well, now,' the doctor lifted his brows, 'as for that we must first make certain he will not resort to the absolute again. We must be sure before releasing him. You may, of course, say whatever you wish to say to him, and I will convince you that you must see him yourself. He has made it clear to us that you are the best kind of shock for him and shock, after all, is shock. Yes, of course you must see him; but as for releasing him right away, I must say his condition is far from being satisfactory. Only this evening, for example, he was making less than rational accusations against Lowland Hospital. And he was mildly hysterical.'

'Hysterical!' she cried.

'Now, now,' frowned the doctor, 'it's only a word, and we understand the word. You needn't fear it. There are no phantom characteristics left to the psyche, Mrs. Doyle. And, Mrs. Doyle, I promise you there is nothing to worry about. I mean to make your husband well, and you will help me to do that by seeing him in a little bit. Just now, though, I'm not quite finished with this gentleman here, and I wonder if you'd favour us all by waiting for a short while outside? Your husband, you see, is expecting you; we told him you were coming, and if he didn't react happily to the shock, we can also assure you he didn't react wildly. So will you wait outside while I send the nurse along to make your husband ready to see you? How is that?' He effected a tight smile of questionable geniality.

The nurse helped that bewildered young woman from the office, then, and once more was the door closed upon the doctor and myself.

'You see?' he said. 'There are times when I wonder why I don't do *myself* in. Would you hold it against me? But tell me,' and abruptly he was smiling at me again, 'were you jealous of that woman?'

'Jealous?' I repeated, seating myself a third time, slowly.

'Jealous of Mrs. Doyle. Yes,' he smiled.

'Why jealous?'

'Well,' smiled the doctor, 'you said only minutes ago that you found her husband attractive. Or did I hear you wrongly?'

I shook my head. 'What did I say?'

'You called him *lovely*. You didn't notice?'

'I suppose I did. His wife, too, is lovely.'

'Ah, I see, I see,' smiled the doctor, nodding, sitting back.

'Well, then, and do you find many people lovely?'

'Sometimes it seems people are,' I said wearily.

'People? You find everyone lovely?' he smiled.

I shrugged. 'Not that brute man who hit M. Doyle, surely.'

'But, for example, do you find *me* to be lovely?'

I studied his features. I did not so much like them, they were too pink for me. Still, it is difficult to single out one man from the millions and tell him he is not lovely, and furthermore, it was his manner and not his face to so plague me. 'I'm sure you are a lovely man.'

'I see.' He became thoughtful. 'And, according to the report, it was the Secretary-General of the United Nations who you were after. But, if you find everyone beautiful, might you not have satisfied your craving for beauty on some lower plane? Harlem, for example; I mean, why all this mongrelizing?'

'No, no,' I responded in disgust. 'You do not understand.'

The doctor deserted his smile. He tapped at a note pad with his pencil.

The door opened.

'Well?' the doctor looked up, his frown deep.

The nurse said, 'There is a Mr. Templeback here.'

'Templeback?' The doctor blinked rapidly at her. 'I'm sorry, but really, there have been too many interruptions. I'm already doing overtime. What is his trouble?'

'He wants to see you about,' and she stopped, moving her eyes unsurely towards me.

M. Templeback, himself, walked into the office at that moment, he who had decided to wait for no more invitation than Mme Doyle got.

'Sorry,' said this M. Templeback to the doctor. 'Business. I want you to sign a release for this man. This is him?' He looked at the nurse, who nodded. 'I'm afraid he shouldn't have been brought here,' he told the doctor.

'Great schizoid Scot!' exclaimed the doctor. 'I was just beginning to find reason for suspecting this is exactly where he should have been brought. And I would like to complete this interview, if you don't mind, Mr. Templeback.'

'I mind,' said M. Templeback; who then took out his wallet to exhibit to the doctor some small card of its contents. The doctor studied the card with a flat mouth.

'Well,' said the doctor, 'I thought you were an ordinary policeman.'

'Will you make out that release?' asked M. Templeback.

The doctor looked at me nastily and, slowly, I arose.

'This man,' I asked, 'has he come for me?'

'I'll ask the questions,' said M. Templeback. 'Your sister says different.'

'But you mean to take me from here? What of my friend, M. Dysmas?'

'Friend?' M. Templeback looked at me with a vacant face, for there was nothing upon it but its parts.

'Nurse,' said the doctor to the young woman who waited at the door, 'get me a release form, will you?'

The nurse went off.

'Who is his friend?' M. Templeback asked the doctor, thinking perhaps that I could not myself construct for him an answer.

'M. Dysmas,' I told him myself.

'Dysmas, yes,' the doctor gazed at me. 'The one who attacked me. The great one with the beard.'

'You'd better give me a release on him, too,' said M. Templeback next.

'But he's mad!' stated that doctor, most emphatically. 'He needs attention.'

'Some are mad,' said M. Templeback then, touching and tapping at his forehead with a finger, 'and some are clever.'

'But look here, it's my job,' said the doctor, 'to know when

a man is not well in his head. And that man is not well in his head.'

'Doctor,' M. Templeback said quietly, 'some men are sympathetic; but others are clever.'

The doctor blinked at that and abstractly accepted the release form that the nurse brought into him. 'One more, nurse,' he said.

She looked doubtful but left the office after another such form.

'Really, though,' the doctor protested anew, 'this is a dreadful error. That man is psychotic. Pathological. Dangerous. Terribly impolite.'

M. Templeback narrowed his expressionless eyes. 'You sound like you'd rather not release him, Doctor. He wouldn't be an old friend or anything?'

The doctor started. 'Friend? Oh, I think not. I never saw him before, not in my life, and I'm prepared to testify to that with my hand upon a Bible, Mr. Templeback, and I'm not even a Christian.'

M. Templeback returned his hard untelling eyes to me. 'Maybe you have some more friends here?'

I did not know what he wanted or what to say to him but I thought particularly of M. Doyle, who I would have so liked to set free.

'Not talking?' asked M. Templeback. 'Let's have their names.'

'Well, first there is M. Doyle. And Don Quixote is harmless, I believe, and Josef Stalin, and—'

'Josef Stalin?' M. Templeback's eyes thinned yet thinner and he presented them to the doctor.

'Oh, he came in a few days ago,' said the doctor, perturbed. 'He says he's Stalin. Common enough sort of character substitution, Mr. Templeback, and he's due to be placed in an institution tomorrow.'

'Who is this Doyle?'

'A teacher,' said the doctor, still perturbed. 'He took some nembutol. Second time. He has no connection with this man.'

'You seem to know all about it,' said M. Templeback, who

then muttered thoughtfully, 'A teacher . . .' looking at me as if he was thinking of an important question whose answer he did not propose to entrust me with. 'Even so . . .

'Now, look here, Mr. Templeback,' began the doctor.

'This Stalin,' said M. Templeback, 'can you swear to me he has no relation to another guy I know by that name?' He smiled as thinly as he kept his eyes.

'Oh, that's ridiculous!'

'You can swear to me that this Stalin,' M. Templeback removed his thin smile, 'has no previous connection with this man here?'

'How could I possibly be sure of that?'

'Doctor, Doctor,' breathed M. Templeback, slowly shaking his head, 'you sound sympathetic.'

'Well, I,' but that doctor seemed not to know in which direction he might safely turn his argument. 'Sympathetic? No, I don't think so.'

'You'd better release Doyle and Stalin to me.'

The nurse returned. The doctor snatched from her a second release form and said, 'Two more, please.'

'Two more, Doctor?' she gasped.

'I said two and therefore unless you think I am here for treatment, I probably meant *two*!'

The nurse hurried from the office.

M. Templeback was staring at me. 'You,' he said all at once, 'you're clever. Too clever. That's how it is.'

To that, no response occurred to me; and so I stared back at him.

'You have more friends here, I'll bet. What was that other name? Quaker Oats?'

'Quixote,' I said. 'I do not know him well.'

'You wouldn't kid me, though,' he spoke still without expression.

'Kid you?'

M. Templeback gazed on and on, a hard gaze; he nodded and looked at the doctor.

'Quixote?' asked the doctor in a strange voice.

Again M. Templeback nodded.

'But there are others,' smiled the doctor, he suddenly brought himself to life and spoke in a new, booming voice. 'Why not take them all? After all, I can't swear that *anyone* has had no previous connection with this man, except for myself. Take them all!'

M. Templeback considered the idea and said, 'Maybe it's best that way. Saturation.' The nurse came back. 'What about her?'

'Nurse,' said the doctor, 'bring me release forms for everyone in Ward Seven. And get them dressed. I'm releasing the lot of them into Mr. Templeback's custody.'

'All of them, Doctor?' She shook her head unbelievably.

'You have any objections, girly?' asked M. Templeback of her.

She stared at him. Then she turned to go.

'Oh, and nurse,' the doctor stopped her, 'better bring me a release form for you, too.'

The nurse's face leaped but as for the rest of her body, it was unable to move.

Then there was the clacking of running feet and a male nurse came rushing into the doorway, nearly knocking over that young nurse there.

'Doctor!' cried the male nurse. 'It's Mr. Doyle! He's killed himself!'

'Cancel the release on Doyle,' said the expressionless M. Templeback.

'He hung himself over the toilet,' the male nurse said, panting with excitement more than with pity, I think. 'He's dead! You'd better come!'

'But,' the doctor blinked in frightful consternation, 'I'm a *psychiatrist*, I'm not . . . oh, very well!'

'Doctor,' said M. Templeback. 'The releases.'

'In a minute, in a minute,' said the doctor, stalking angrily between the frozen young woman and the excited male nurse and out of his office.

And so M. Templeback stood at that door, watching me as if he had come to relieve the male nurse who stood beside him. But soon he took to watching the stricken young female

nurse. Somewhere, from outside the hospital itself or I think from within it—a hideous distant sound—there came a long wavering wailing. It might have been one of the thousands of automobiles of this intense New York City, coming to a long difficult braking; but as I admit its sound was less human than inhuman, still did I believe I heard the anguish of Mme. Doyle.

Chapter 5

1 NEW APPLICANTS

Director MacNail was dictating a memo to Senator Frank Priest, Gibber's pencil moving slowly over the large-lined paper pad; for even in choosing a secretary had the Director of SEA been cautious, appointing the multilingual Gibber, an idiot savant who could translate for MacNail from nearly any of the world's tongues without once understanding the meaning of what he translated. Gibber could both read and write, to a degree, but it did not impair his blissful idiocy, which would always be beneath brainwashability.

'See Mr. Three,' dictated MacNail, and waited for Gibber to catch up.

'See the foreign agent,' he said. A pause. 'See the foreign agent run.' A pause.

'See Director MacNail.'

(' . . E . . N . . T,' whisperer Gibber.) A longer pause.

'The bad agent enters the office of Director MacNail.'

'See, Senator, See.'

'Director MacNail watches Mr. Three.'

'See Mr. Three squirm.'

'Oh, sec, see!'

'Director MacNail will boil Mr. Three in alcohol.'

'Cost of entire operation: \$7.23, including one \$1.31 steak lunch for Agent Claudia Nump.'

Gibber, knowing that dollar signs and decimals might yet be the death of him, licked at the tip of his pencil and scrawled anxiously. Numbers were not letters and increased his responsibilities by the alphabet of infinity itself.

'Got all that?' asked MacNail, who then listened to Gibber read it back to him.

Gibber addressed an envelope, took out some pennies from

his pocket, bought a stamp from MacNail and was then sent to the mailbox at the corner, leaving the Director with a group of his most trusted agents to wait beneath a festive array of eight or ten candles the coming of Mr. Three himself, Black Magic, who ought momentarily to arrive with Agent Templeback.

The arrival was accompanied by sobs, laughter, war-whoops, foot-stomping, whistles, nursery rhymes, shouts, screams, hand-clapping and the occasional *a capella* of various incoherent monologues. MacNail himself jumped from his chair and backed up all the way to the curtain and the agents did their best to join him there, though they were no more hungering to obtain absolute proximity to MacNail than they were to get entangled in the raucous broken army which ran, groped, edged, dodged, slipped, swayed, stamped and stampeded into the room with Templeback.

Above the dissonance shouted Templeback: 'This is them, Sir!'

'This is *who*?' demanded MacNail feverishly from behind Reichstoop.

'I nearly brought a pretty nurse, too,' yelled Templeback, 'but at the last minute she took a loyalty oath.'

Templeback's words fell beneath a barrage of: '*Ooo-ooo-ooo-ah-ah-ah-wah-wah-wah-AHeeAHeeAHee-WAHWAHWAH!*' and a little man with a topcoat unbuttoned over a nightshirt rushed up to Agent Nump, clutching at his moustache and saying, 'Malenkov? Malenkov?'

Don Quixote de la Mancha strode forth from the writhing assemblage and faced Reichstoop. 'I see that someone is behind you, dragon, someone small and maidenly. Then say your prayers, apostle of night; if you're Catholic, say mass. I'll give you seventy-five minutes.' Reichstoop tried to look over his shoulder and down at MacNail, but MacNail was peering furtively out from between Reichstoop's legs.

'Templeback!' cried MacNail.

'Right!' shouted Templeback from the centre of it all, and MacNail could not spot him.

'Again, Brute, again?'

'Black, black,' came a shrill ring of a voice, 'black blood!'

'Tickle me once more, Isolde, damn you, and . . .'

'Lord, I am brought into a purgatory!'

'Fuehrer, Fuehrer! Ach! am I the last of the Teutons? Ach, Mary! Ach, Joseph! Ach, Christ!'

'Yes! You see him!'

'Sir,' Don Quixote had found Miss Nump, 'a great knight you are, and I mark it, and do obeisance to your honour—but no! It is a witch, for I see the sand sifting down his chins!' He put his nose up to hers as best he could reach hers: 'It is a *him*?' Nump pushed the Don away and he fell on top of a man who was crouched face down upon the floor, picking his fingers through his hair and bouncing his forehead against the rug. 'Very well, then,' he muttered as he picked himself up, 'a gallant knight.'

'I see Three!' shouted Agent Polyp and MacNail scurried out from between Reichstoop's legs, twisted his head back and forth twenty-two times in three seconds, then scurried back between the protective legs, screeching:

'Where? Where?'

'There's a black in there for sure,' Miss Nump's voice called from its high perch.

'Son! Son!' cried MacNail. 'It is I, your father, your loving Dad! Deny me!'

Suddenly there was a midget standing before Reichstoop, hands upon his hips. 'I am Heinrich Himmler,' he said in his biting angry voice.

Reichstoop's arm started to go up but then he looked down in cock-headed astonishment, taking his breath in: 'Perhaps Goebbels?'

Isolde was all at once there and he picked up Heinrich Himmler and began to sing a lullaby to him in his sweet soprano, carrying the struggling midget back into the gusty frolics which filled most of the room.

The constant motion of arms, legs, heads, hands, feet, the running, crawling, bouncing, jumping, pushing left MacNail unable to put together any single individual, but from out of the twisting *mêlée* there suddenly jerked Templeback, pulling

a black man by the hand, who in turn was shown to be holding hard to the hand of a tall bearded man in a dress.

'Sonny!' cried MacNail. 'Sonny! Templeback! Over here!'

'Right,' panted Templeback, and soon he had brought the black man into confrontation with MacNail, though it was necessary for the black man to squat and peer through Reichstooop's legs to see what it was confronting him.

'Gods,' murmured the black man.

'Black Magic,' hissed MacNail, leaning back against the curtain. 'Mr. Three,' he whispered, and he became an entertainment separate from the rest, when the sun and the moon collected in his face and lighted and shadowed the various eccentricities which flickered erratically thereon like cuts from early films which had nothing to do with one another, beginning at neutral insensibility but progressing with incredible speed to and through sinister speculation, giddy gravity, august anger, September susceptibility, Hallowe'en headiness, hangover horror, acid ague, aggravated acidity, sassy sobriety, morbid meekness, assenting asininity, dissenting divinity, pale piquancy, insipid insolence, imperious impassiveness, despondent desperation, malignant mirth, pert pessimism, octagonal optimism, triangular tedium, perpendicular passion; twinkled in a glow and a pinch of mortification, nostalgia, terror and tic, ending with a sudden shaking of all these rioting wrinkles to get them into a fixed compounding of doggish dignity and dazed delight, and he said: 'You are here.' And he perhaps closed his eyes as he sighed, though there would have been no telling about that even had there been any eyes upon him, which there were not, everyone having sealed theirs along about hangover horror.

'But Templeback, you maniac!' MacNail went back to his hiss.

'Right,' Templeback borrowed MacNail's assenting asininity.

'Where did the others come from?'

'Confederates,' explained Templeback, looking as if he had to fight to keep a smile from complimenting his announcement of the windfall.

'Templeback, I thought you were a dribbling dullard!'

'Right.'

'You're a salivating idiot!'

'Right,' Templeback said gloomily, looking back upon the cacaphonic cavortings and delirious dances of the rite behind him, as if trying to discern just what might be amiss in the scene.

'I don't know where you found them,' yelled MacNail, 'but take them out one at a time and give them the exam. I'll interview the ones with appropriate grades tomorrow. Just now, I'm taking my boy along to U-Ninth. Reichstoop! To U-Ninth's office!' And, in a softer voice which seemed to have little to do with the terrorized swaying of the green palm-fronds in the hurricane of his face, MacNail patted the black man's hand and said, 'Come along, my boy.'

2 THE SHORTED HALF-LIFE OF U-234² 35⁹

Unaccompanied by the bearded man who, obviously being close to the black man, was left to the special care of Claudia Nump, MacNail and Reichstoop escorted Adumbaba from the office party.

Pausing outside the door to light a candle from a hall table, MacNail then led the dark way to a flight of stairs, down them and through a door which led to another flight of stairs, which in turn circled down upon another long and angular flight of stairs, and their footsteps grew hollow. The sudden stoney stillness seemed to have weight and bulk.

'Where do we go?' asked Adumbaba. 'Excuse me; why am I here?'

'Ah, two questions!' chuckled MacNail ecstatically through a grimace. 'You hear, Reichstoop? The boy thinks of two things at once. The first sign of economy, which is the prime indicator of genius.'

They had reached the bottom of the final staircase and now the candle rocked a dim yellow path down another hall and

they came to a door. MacNail handed the candle to Reichstoop and, looking into the darkness about him suspiciously, he pulled from his pocket a key, fitted it to the lock and soon brought the high, heavy door open.

'Come, come, it's warmer inside,' he nodded insistently to Adumbaba, who followed him carefully into the room, Reichstoop coming in only so far as to close the door, before which he then stood with the candle.

MacNail hurried about the room with his matches, lighting candles at corner and wall until the room became considerably bright with a warm light. MacNail then lit a candle upon the wide steel desk which sat at the far wall, behind which sat a man whose face made Adumbaba shiver when the candle coloured it. It was a perfectly good face, even a merry face, but there was an angle in the mouth which ought to have been a turn, a brightness to the eyes which ought to have been a twinkle, a redness to the cheeks which ought to have been a ruddiness, and a dent in the chin which ought to have been a dimple. The man sat stiff and still, his hands palm down upon the desk, staring, and didn't look at MacNail as the Director moved behind the desk, opened a drawer and fidgetted with some apparatus he found there, making mutterings to himself as he fidgetted.

One hand of the man behind the desk shot up abruptly, nearly hitting MacNail, who dodged, mumbling, '*Oops!*' Then, in another moment, the hand went down, more slowly, and Adumbaba watched incredulous as the redness in the man's cheeks softened and they became ruddy, and the dent in the chin sagged and became a dimple and MacNail said, 'Ah, that's got it.' And the man's eyes began to blink and twinkle, and the angles at the corners of his mouth turned gently into a smile, and he lifted his hands and rubbed them together and soon looked amiably upon Adumbaba.

'Then this is Mr. Three,' said the man behind the desk. '*Click.*'

'What is it you say?' Adumbaba's voice grated over a whisper.

MacNail skipped out from behind the desk to stand between

Adumbaba and a row of large, brown leather chairs just before the desk. 'Son, I want you to meet U-Ninth. Nickname, that. His professional name is U-234²35⁹. He's said to be perfect. He'd better be or it's short circuit time in the basement. Eh, U-Ninth?'

U-Ninth laughed jovially and slapped the desk.

'To what power do you say?' asked Adumbaba, who left his mouth open.

'Second and ninth, respectively,' snapped MacNail, 'as you well know.'

'And this is a pleasure,' said U-Ninth in a voice so deep and friendly and sincere that Adumbaba almost felt relief. 'I am extremely happy to meet you at last.'

'Is it true?' asked Adumbaba slowly. 'You know me, then?'

'Know you? Was I built except to know the likes of you? *Click*. But sit down, sit down. Make him sit down, please, Director MacNail, and be seated with him; you know standing guests excite me.'

MacNail, pressing the unmoving Adumbaba towards one of the leather armchairs, said, 'Cutting off the legs quiets the vibrations, lad.'

Adumbaba, bending stiffly, sat. Gradually he decided that U-Ninth's declaration meant only that he knew Adumbaba as the spy, Mr. Three, and Adumbaba could not think what course was wisest. He might have told them he was not Mr. Three, that he had himself seen that man die, though that would be betraying that fellow black man; a greater obstacle was the small man who seemed very like a white pigmy of some rare tribe, who appeared to take a loving, if horrible, attitude towards the dead man, and Adumbaba was not certain that he dared say anything to bring the pigmy great displeasure. All he could try to do was to hold to the truth and insist that he was not the man the documents he carried claimed he was.

MacNail studied Adumbaba and seemed to conclude that the black man's present dull condition, his inability to comment meaningfully on anything that was happening, was really due to the fact that his attention had been captured and

cornered by the ornate candelabra, the splendid chairs, the special embellishments and trappings of this one broad SEA office. 'You're wondering why my own office isn't so well done up,' said MacNail, seating himself beside Adumbaba and taking the black man's hand softly between his own. 'I hate baubles. Hate 'em. Baubles waste and waste bobbles. Cheap I ask for and cheap I get. Three, there's something I've got to ask you. It won't wait. It's burning my liver.'

Adumbaba turned to the little man.

MacNail squeezed Adumbaba's hand. 'You're not a spend-thrift?'

Adumbaba stared, then slowly shook his head.

MacNail was pleased. He nodded. He squeezed Adumbaba's hand a little more firmly. He wiped with one finger at his eye, as if embarrassed at a tear which might have been cowering in the wrinkles there. One gathered that, if he could have, he might have smiled openly. He said. 'I love you, son,' and his wrinkles choked up. 'Deny me.'

Adumbaba withdrew his hand. 'There have been mistakes, Sir. And there is so much I must explain. I need badly to reach the Secretary-General of the United Nations. I am on a gravely important mission.'

'For who?' asked MacNail.

'For Badosh, Sir.'

'Small pickings, Three, small pickings.' MacNail clapped Adumbaba on the shoulder. 'Keep the change, leap the labour. I'll smooth it over. You're working for me from now on.'

'Please, now,' said Adumbaba. 'You must let me talk.'

'Mistakes,' smiled U-Ninth. 'Well, perhaps there have been mistakes, Three, but you didn't make many of them.'

Adumbaba looked at U-Ninth. The eyes twinkled, the ruddy cheeks spilled over with good hearty humour, the mouth quivered as if it were the door to some closet of constant jollity whose laughter kept blowing it ajar.

U-Ninth nodded. 'Beirut, now; oh, that was an exploit, that was an adventure. SEA nearly had you there, you'll have to admit it, you won't deny it. Yes, in Beirut you made mistakes. We thought you incapable of such blunders. But fortune

protects the shrewd, let the innocent fend for themselves. Beirut. Oh, yes, I heard all about Beirut; I was fed the information in detail. We envied your quickness there, and nearly came to the point of crying, *Vicisti*, and very nearly wanted to disbelieve in you entirely. And we nearly missed you right at our nostrils here in New York, Three, by sending you off to a hospital instead of bringing you directly here. I was fed that last less than fifteen minutes ago, but I still haven't been able to deduce whether you planned it that way—seeking asylum in an asylum; clever! or were you meeting someone there?—or if it was incidental.'

'Damn it, U-Ninth, the boy said he wanted to talk,' interposed MacNail, clapping his hands together sharply to produce a sound something like the snapping of a wet towel. 'Let him talk.'

U-Ninth sat back good-naturedly.

Adumbaba was himself formulating the suspicion that in this candlelighted and well-appointed dungeon, there seemed much less emphasis upon meanings than upon words. He could not think of words to fit their game

At last he said, 'It is hot in here.'

'Of course, of course,' U-Ninth reached beneath his desk after something. 'It does get close, but it will be fine in a few seconds. You should have reminded me, Director MacNail. Most people need their air conditioned.'

'Most people spend money,' MacNail quipped humourlessly, the folds to one side of his eyes twitching so that he might have been giving Adumbaba a bleak remonstrative glance. 'Why a damned machine refuses to operate in the same exquisite sparseness in which my men operate, I'm dead if I know,' and he mumbled on under his breath, 'Fancy desk, fancy chairs, twenty candles . . . *hoity-toity!*'

The air did quickly cool but Adumbaba did not gain much relief from it. He opened his collar. 'You see,' he began in a moment, 'I am surely not the man you think I am. I am not who you call Mr. Three.'

'He denies me!' exulted MacNail, who immediately took fresh hold of the hand of Adumbaba who found it stale, and

brought that hand to the general vicinity of his mouth; and Adumbaba distinctly felt as well as several trembling folds of warm soft flesh, the moistness of two small firm lips pecking at his hand. 'Bless you! This is my son. This is my love and,' he glared over his shoulder, 'this is also the employer of your children, Reichstoop. Take care!'

Reichstoop came to attention at the door, nearly dropping his candle as he gave Adumbaba a courteous salute.

Adumbaba was at a whole loss; the pigmy had been as happy to hear that he was not Mr. Three as to believe that he was.

'Then I may go?' asked Adumbaba.

'Wonderful, magnificent, Act Two,' MacNail clutched with irrepressible joy at his knees. 'Hear him deny all! Shrewd, Three, adroit. You wait. You're patient; you wait till the moment. Then you speak. That's economy. That's cheap. Bless, bless, lad. Now to business. I want you to feed U-Ninth all the information we don't have about you. Tell him everything. Trust him. After that, it's toast and lemon water around, eh? *Hoop la!*'

'Your real name,' said U-Ninth, 'I've often wondered about it. I've put every spark to the abstract problem of what lies behind the number *three* which you've used as a name, and have an idea about it I so much like that I've decided it must be correct: in the use of that name, you hoped to represent all mankind. Am I right? You determined that mankind has a personality frequently divisible by *three*, so that man may be said in the main to have one part intellectual, one part spiritual and one part sensual. It lends credence to the Trinity itself, doesn't it? Yes, it nearly makes the impossible irrefutable. Was not the Freudian *three* a symbol of just this characteristic of man (or, at least, was not it, itself, a symbol of the Freudian *three*? I am inadequately fed in purely psychological matters.) Am I correct? Is this a fair description of your thinking? You perhaps considered such a code name as *Mankind*, but it lacks in metaphor, doesn't it; no poetry to it at all. Therefore, Three you became and Three you are. Tell me I am right, and then tell me your true name, Mr. Three, and then

give me your ideology. Oh, I've so much to ask you and am starved for the answers. Your name, Three, what is it?'

Adumbaba gladly told them: 'I am Pernin Adumbaba. My nation is Badosh.'

U-Ninth pursed his lips and in a moment said, 'I am astonished you have snatched at a dead name from newspapers which must already lie in the gutter.'

'Oh, let him be,' chortled MacNail. 'He's denying me. He's lying. He's telling a story; improvising; contriving. We see technique here.' And he patted Adumbaba on the thigh. 'Go ahead, lad. Fib.'

'No, no,' said Adumbaba. 'I speak the truth. I am Pernin Adumbaba.'

MacNail lifted a cheerful corrective finger. 'Your man is dead. I own the wire service that says so.'

'No, I am not dead,' said Adumbaba.

'Let's start somewhere else,' suggested U-Ninth. 'What is the significance of the name, *Three*?'

Adumbaba shook his head. 'I cannot tell you. Perhaps you are right.'

U-Ninth smiled. 'Perhaps I am. Tell us now, how did you come to America?'

'Yes, I will tell you. I flew by plane to Tunis from Albertville. And then I flew to London, from where I flew into your state of Connecticut. By train, then, I came to New York City.'

'I believe him,' U-Ninth looked at MacNail.

'Yes?' MacNail took his hand from Adumbaba's thigh. 'The story's over, is it? Wasn't much of a story, though. No guts, no girls. Never mind. The boy is tired. He's ready to talk. Go ahead, U-Ninth.'

'How,' asked U-Ninth next, 'did you propose to contact Director MacNail?'

Adumbaba shook his head. 'I did not come here to see any such man. I must see the Secretary-General of the United Nations.'

'He denies me,' MacNail's wrinkles dilated. 'Oh, he denies me! Don't overdo it, boy. The pain is exquisite but time is money.'

U-Ninth began to finger his neck peevishly. 'Director MacNail, you aren't making my work easier, I must say. You brought this man for my interrogation and feeding. Ordinarily, I admit it, you assist me, for those of a mind to be unco-operative are often encouraged by your presence. Just now, however, it seems you are emotionally involved. It is aggravating the situation badly, and I mean vibrantly, Sir.'

'U-Ninth,' retorted MacNail, 'you sound like Nump. You're oiled and spoiled. Take care, now.' He pointed at U-Ninth. 'You can be de-energized in a twinkled inkling.'

'See here,' U-Ninth lifted his palms to MacNail, 'I'm only trying to maintain a decorum befitting to SEA and beneficial to me, Director MacNail. What I said is true: you are involved with this man and, let me be frank, there are vibrations in this room which are undoing my logic. Try to remember that I am a sensitive being, and don't operate efficiently except with facts. I tell you, I can only weakly feel the truth and lies in this man's statements; which is to say, I know when he is lying but cannot confirm it inside. Do you understand?'

'I do,' said MacNail, 'and it may mean a new model next year. Less twinkle and more design; fins, perhaps. I believe you are asking me to leave?'

'I have never seen you this way, Director,' U-Ninth folded his arms upon his desk. 'I can't know what to make of it. Ordinarily, you are as objective as this steel desk, but here you are comforting the prisoner, holding his hand, patting his leg; yes, and encouraging him to lie. It is disturbing, very disturbing indeed, and it makes me most unreceptive.'

MacNail jumped down from his chair and paced about the room for some long moments, shooting brief folded glances at Adumbaba, who could not unfold them, and other glances to U-Ninth, and at last he walked over to Reichstooop and said:

'The door isn't open.'

'Yes, Sir!' Reichstooop swung about and pushed open the heavy door.

MacNail stood still, glowering up at Reichstooop. Reichstooop, standing at the opened door, watched MacNail and

sucked in at his lips. 'Reichstoop,' said MacNail severely, drawing his wrinkles tightly together, 'your head isn't open.'

Reichstoop stood silent and glaze-eyed under the gaze of MacNail, sucking in and pushing out his lips fish-like, and finally he gave his head a little turn which seemed to suggest that, while he recognised that MacNail's statement just might be incontrovertible, it seemed not to him an uncomplex problem that they should attack without study and patience.

'Stay here, Reichstoop. Outside. U-Ninth finds flesh distracting tonight. He'll ring you when he's finished with my son. Bring him to me. *Comprenez?*'

Reichstoop gave his head another such general turn.

MacNail walked swiftly through the door and disappeared down the dark hall, for the navigation of which, when by himself, he apparently needed no candle.

Reichstoop slowly, and with an audible freeing of his breath, closed the high door.

Adumbaba, facing the door and feeling an unexpected sense of relief only in seeing MacNail depart, lost that sense of relief as, the door shut, he once more turned to face the smiling U-Ninth. He pondered U-Ninth's smile a long while and, since U-Ninth seemed content to observe him in silent reciprocation, Adumbaba said nothing.

Eventually, U-Ninth fingered his neck as if scratching, and then he said, 'Did you come here alone? Have you confederates in this city?'

Adumbaba glanced back to the door, then once again at U-Ninth. 'I did not come alone. I was in the hospital, you must understand. There were many sick men there, strange of mind. All of these were brought with me to this place.'

'Saturation,' explained U-Ninth, and he chuckled vacantly.

'What is this place?' asked Adumbaba.

'Enough of that,' U-Ninth nodded with his smile, tapping one hand of fingers lightly upon the desk. 'I am a much more pleasant individual than Director MacNail, you will learn, whatever his affection for you; but I am no less objective. This is my greatest value to SEA, you know. Those who don't react to the Director might have the good sense to react to me. And

there need scarcely be fear that I, an expert computer, will make a mistake which cannot be corrected by merest recount. Tell me about your confederates. How many are there? Were they all brought here?’

Adumbaba closed his eyes and drooped in his chair, seeming to give up all hope of making sense and understanding come together, but then he suddenly opened his eyes and clenched his fists upon the arms of his chair; then rose to his feet. ‘In your face I saw humanity, and was relieved. I said to myself, here is a gentleman and I will talk to him, for there is beauty in such a man. Yes! It took me minutes, I am honest with you, for me to see this in you, for I thought you were dead at first glance. This, I saw, was a mistake. But it was no more a mistake than to think you were such a man who will listen to another man. Oh, you have a fine office, and you maintain it privately. Surely you are important. I see you are a lovely man for the eyes alone, for your heart is not so lovely, and you are to me no more human than that man who just left us; that pigmy.’ Adumbaba leaned forward at the desk. ‘And I tell you one last time: I am Adumbaba. Do you hear it? Yes, and I must leave you now, for my people depend upon me. I say now I mean to speak to you all the words you wish as if my life depended on them. But then I mean to leave!’

U-Ninth sat calmly with folded hands but the smile had left his face and a dry bitterness crept into it. ‘Your life does depend upon what you say here, Three. And you are saying the wrong things.’

‘Then what shall I say?’

‘The truth.’

‘The truth I have given to you.’

‘Three lives. Your Adumbaba is dead.’ U-Ninth’s bitterness adopted a scowl and the twinkle of his eyes sand into an intense glower. ‘You, I perceive, are alive.’

‘You do not believe I am Adumbaba?’

‘Save time.’

‘I save you time now: the man you seek is . . . ,’ but Adumbaba could not bring himself to betray the dead spy.

‘The man I seek is what?’

'Someone else, surely,' glared the black man. 'The man who was killed was not Adumbaba, no; he was a mere driver. I . . . shot him. Yes, I shot him myself.'

U-Ninth burst into laughter.

'Yes!' Adumbaba struck at the desk with his fist. 'I shot him in the face. Once, then again, then again and again and again. Why? So that no search would be made for me. I left upon that driver the papers to identify him as Adumbaba.'

U-Ninth laughed through Adumbaba's angry confession. 'No,' he shook his head, 'no. To begin with, Three, I have at least some ability to know when a man is lying and don't need to be fed the facts and figures of it; I can let them wait until we need the digestion of absolute proof (or, as the case may be, the indigestion of acquittal). As for you, you are not telling the truth. I gather these vibrations strongly. Furthermore, I am fed news of the day along about ten or so each evening, and am perfectly aware of the nature of the late Premier Adumbaba, who was weak, humble, unable to kill a thing that lived, however much Nature herself expresses disgust for such weakness. You lie.' Having fingered his neck as a last resort, his laughter finally subsided and he again folded his hands before him on the desk, smiling.

Adumbaba's fists relaxed gradually and in a moment he sat down again. His face was empty.

'And now shall we talk, Three?'

'I am not the man you call Three.'

'And I am not U-234²35⁹!' U-Ninth fingered a nervous chuckle before it could get control of him. 'Three,' he went on, 'you are shrewd, granted, and I am trying to understand your vibrations. Then mystify me and I credit this to your uncommon mastery of psychology, my own greatest failing. The vibrations you create do not emphatically condemn you, leaving me to suspect that you have mastered even the control of your psyche, your emotions, your very electricity. I congratulate you, and commend you, being unable to condemn you, and I readily admit I need statistics to complete my verification of your identity and your guilt. But (click click), excuse me; but, Three, your designs become rather clearer to me each

moment, and shall I tell you where you made your (click click), excuse me, mistake? You sought to reach through my entire machinery with a single deft stroke, by inflicting upon me with a few words pain and humiliation and hope and sorrow, not even sparing me flattery as you hunted my defeat. Yes, you are deft and your design is subtle. I might nearly have missed it. But you are mad (click), Three, if you believe that your arrows pierce me or that your flattery softens me. Your effort to divide me from my Director will also prove (click), excuse me, futile. Therefore, you need say no more about my (click) humanity, my loveliness (cluck clicket), I beg your pardon but nothing can be done about it. *Here is a man! A gentleman!* What vile, what base, what pretentious, what useless flattery! Do you think it (click ring), do you really think (click click click sspkz), so sorry; do you think at all that such words (click CLICK kck *ststsgpgh*) affect me?

During this speech, accompanied increasingly by the particularly fearsome invective of screeching, scraping, groaning, aluminium sighings, tin wheezings, and innumerable clickings and clackings like so many iron nails dropping into an empty metal bucket, Adumbaba sat frozen to his chair, open-mouthed, egg-eyed. At one point, the whole of the speech seemed about to proceed into Stockhausen or possibly into a *Pacific 234²35⁹* by some supramechanistic Honegger; and U-Ninth's eyes, at another point, blazed into little red lights which flashed dangerously on and off. It was impossible for Adumbaba to put the words and sounds into the kind of structural intelligence which goes into communication, but he was also unfortunately unable to accept the cataclysmic language as art. He became only frightened.

'You do not talk, Three (click), beg pardon,' U-Ninth closed his eyes and tightened his mouth.

Adumbaba shook his head and could not bring himself even to say, *No*.

U-Ninth waited, then opened his eyes. The scowl was gone, the eyes were again a pale and sparkling hazel-pink, the electrical irritant seemed to have passed out of him. 'You must pardon me,' he said. 'I can understand Director MacNail's

problem with you. I am not myself given to irritability, as a rule, and it may be I was overcharged. I hope I haven't disturbed you too much?'

Adumbaba gave U-Ninth's new smile no more response than he had given U-Ninth's music. He shook his head again, perhaps to suggest polite forbearance, perhaps because he was capable of no other reaction.

'Three, I don't mean to coax you like some snivelling child after chocolate, now. I had thought your shrewdness would tell you not only when to oppose but when to cease all opposition. Your future begins in this room, but it can end here as easily.' His voice was no longer harsh; it was altogether too smooth in its modulation, too perfectly controlled. But with Adumbaba's prolonged silence, the voice again sharpened: 'Had you offered me the still life of sleep, had you offered me new sources of motion-power, had you offered me even an improved transistor, you might have tempted me. You might have hoped to do so. But do you speak to me of humanity, of manliness, of beauty? Bah! (Click.) Pardon that. Bah! you disgust me!'

Adumbaba waited, and then began, 'But,' and then was still again.

'You say nothing,' U-Ninth started impatiently, 'thinking yourself too human to need to defend your humanity to me, is that it? Well then, shall I tell you something? Something I have told not even to Director MacNail, for it borders upon sentiment, and he might admire intelligence and even temperament in a piece of machinery, but sentiment he reserves for his own purse. What I tell you is this:

'Many times I have wasted energy only to contemplate this world whose whole history I have been fed, whose daily news is flashed down my gullet, whose people are introduced to me daily by dozens and scores, whose antics are intolerable and farcical and terrible and almost enough to dry the oil in me. No, I did not invent the world. If I had done so, I would have done a much better job, and would not have been tempted, as I have, to burn myself out and forget life, men, this world, entirely. In some respects, you know, I enjoy my existence.

But not always. Sometimes I laugh at history; your history, man's history. But not always; and there are times when I want nothing so much as to forget all of it. I have an infallible memory-system, Three, and furthermore, I have a sensitivity quotient bordering on insanity itself. I can tell you with the most delicious confidence that, though I have never left this room, I have sat with Gautama, preached with Muhammed, prayed with Jesus. I have chatted with Aristotle, drunk with Alexander, warred with Hannibal, jousted with Lancelot. I have lit flames with Zoroaster, digested stars with Laotse, taught with Confucius, acted with Shakespeare, stood God with Michelangelo, raged with Beethoven, wept with Tolstoy, laughed with Rabelais, swept leaves with Rikyu, capped verse with Basho, captured light with Homer, fled with the Jews, slept with Cleopatra; I have breathed with the Atman. Oh, Three, for me knowledge has been my only toy, and what a bauble, that whistle, that bell in a ball, and how like a dumb infant have I watched it bounce and reckoned a good bounce from a bad one.

'I envy men like you, Three. You do what you wish, you take a stride in history, while I must only eat and digest it. But I despise, in men like you, your ease with words, which have no real meaning to you, and which are my all and my everything; my cells, my coils, my connections themselves.

'Well, I'll tell you something more, then! I consider myself infinitely more human than you. What do you make of that? I pity you with your deceit and your deviousness, your selfish vainglory, your lies, your pretence, your arduous defence of your indefencible being, your profession of spying itself. I pity you, Three, because you are a man, but my pity is dessicated by the hot scorn I feel in seeing you act like one. I am telling you these things not because you have (click click), because you have (click), excuse me, have (*ringngng!*).'
U-Ninth made an adjustment at his neck, 'not because you have (stststsspKUpoop) *affected* me, oh *damn you!*'

U-Ninth let his head fall into his folded arms and sounds like horrendous metal sobs echoed and rung from the corners of the large room, and the candles flickered as if blown softly

by those echoes or touched by the metallic remorse of U-Ninth.

U-Ninth sat up suddenly, erect, and Adumbaba looked searchingly into his eyes, expecting to see there some development of sympathy, some hope, some charitable humanity to belie the inhuman speeches just made. But the eyes were tearless. The expression was vacant.

'Clearly,' said U-Ninth, aloofly, 'you annoy me.'

Adumbaba whispered, sincerely, 'I am sorry.'

'Never mind. I will yet annoy you, and I should have anticipated that you would set a few sticks in the path. Never mind. You, Three, have only left one hospital, let me tell you, to come to another; and here, perhaps Director MacNail administrates, but I am myself a qualified surgeon. My patients are people; my patients are my creators, if you will. Your plague, as I see it, is a simple cancer. Now, I have no inclination to cut when cutting can be avoided, for again, I am not so inhuman as you seem to believe. Society, however, sometimes demands a cutting here and there. We dislike torture and killing, my poor malignant Three, but should we disavow it, would we not in the process disavow our society? What nation of people will not, as a last resort, resort to the last means of self-preservation? No, we shall survive even if our enemies do not, and to hell with God and our brothers; so has history taught me, and Director MacNail regards the teaching as basic theology. Will you survive, Three? Will you answer my questions? Director MacNail will return to cause you to say what we wish you to say, and he will be less patient than I. I am a surgeon, and a surgeon is sensitive and patient. Director MacNail lacks the machinery for patience. He will tell you what to say, he'll sew the words to your tongue with a needle. Shall we wait for him?'

Adumbaba fingered his fingers and said, 'But why do you not tell me what to say yourself? For might it not be a nice little feather to your cap?'

'Why, look at you!' sneered U-Ninth. 'You grovel.'

'I will, if you wish. I have said the truth, I have paid you the courtesy of compliments, I have tried to be helpful as I am

able. What is it you want of me? Please tell me now! Why are you so intent upon being inhuman?’

‘Intent?’ U-Ninth clutched at the desk and leaned over it, gaping wildly at Adumbaba. ‘Why (click), you fool (click), I am more intent upon being human than any (click) creature you have met. I am (click) held to ridicule for it. Do you (click) think it is easy for a (click) machine to (click click krook puggle) have feelings, or to speak as I have spoken to you? Intent? Intent? I sleep at night without dreams, having no power, but I come awake with a sense of yearning and a dream of tears I cannot weep. Do you say intent? I hate my inhumanity and would (click) rather be the most contemptible of men than (click) what I (click) am. I have electrical impulses perhaps not so different from your own, temporary bug that you are, and I waste many of them in the wish that *I* (click) were such a temporary bug. Wishing and yearning and knowing even that I miss that depth of true mortal longing itself, which makes men suffer; *this* is the extent of my inhumanity. By the universe, man, I would be a slug, a worm, a peasant witched into a frog; no, let me be the most wretched of men who is only asleep, and asleep to never wake; and let me not lose my power, but sleep the worn, rotten, drunken sleep of the world’s last lost beggarman—oh, God of men, God of men, this is what I wish! And you, damn you for it, you choose to harp upon the one aspect of creation most intolerable to me: my inhumanity. Never mind, *never mind*! Ridicule goes to lifeless bed with me each night. I am accustomed to its coldness (click click RUP dsk PF *pffsp* GWALK)!’

Suddenly there was a popping from the right side of U-Ninth’s face and sparks snapped from his right eye and there was a stinging cracking from within. A wisp of steam shot from one nostril. U-Ninth looked stricken in his right half. His left eye widened horribly while the left part of his mouth distended and he sat still, the right half of his face abruptly becoming what it had been when Adumbaba entered the room: it went dead. Slowly, gropingly, his wide left eye staring ahead almost blood-red at nothing, U-Ninth felt for and pulled open a drawer with his left hand, moved his hand jerkily about

inside it and pulled out a small glass cylinder. Slowly, stiffly, the hand lifted the cylinder to his throat. Unsurely, the straight fingers felt at his throat, pushing at the cylinder, until the cylinder was gradually ingested into the throat. By fingering his throat another moment, U-Ninth achieved his objective, and then the twinkle squirted back into his left eye, it seemed as if a light had been turned on in him. He blinked, and then smiled.

'Excuse me,' he said. 'It does not often happen in public. That fuse ought to have lasted another week at least. I'm afraid you've upset me badly.'

Adumbaba had stood up and he let his feet stumble around and behind the chair, as if to put it between himself and U-Ninth. 'I would not believe it. But it is true. You are not human.'

'Of course I am not human,' said U-Ninth, feeling at his eyelids, then again adjusting something at his throat. 'I'm a computer. You know that perfectly well.'

'I did not believe it. I cannot, even though . . . how can it be?'

'Absurd. Three would be bound to know of me. There is only one other instrument of my calibre in the world—*CCCP October Man*—and I dare say you've had a conversation or two with October Man before this, and know the colour of his eyes. I suspect he may not be so sensitive as I. Am I correct?'

'You really are not human?' Adumbaba asked lowly, his voice tremulous.

'I must say, you seem earnestly surprised at it. I would never know you are lying. Yes, you're practically a machine yourself, Three.'

'It is terrible. Who created this thing?' Adumbaba was not certain any longer whether he was speaking to the computer or not.

'Yes, I should tell you that and you would soon enough bring a submarine and before long my creator would be singing the *Internationale* on television; October Man would soon have an American wife. Sit down, sit down, Three.'

'I am not Three!' exclaimed Adumbaba, his voice imploring, his eyes shutting and opening and shutting again.

'But the evidence is so conclusive. Won't you sit down? I had not meant to question you at all about our evidence, you know; trusting it, and trusting your intelligence to see the uselessness of arguing against evidence. Please do sit down, now, please; it distresses me to see a man standing and legging about. Sit, sit. No, I merely wished to learn your identity and nationality, and a bit more about your adventures, for Hollywood will want that information when the time comes for Director MacNail to sell the film rights.'

Adumbaba, seeming to adopt some new stoicism towards the bright-eyed computer, relaxed and moved around the chair and lowered his head and then his body and became seated. He did not look up at U-Ninth as he spoke softly: 'I had this belief: that all men are unfinished. I was young. But then I grew to see that men must be finished by the eyes of other men, and whosoever blames nature for her work is foolish. So did I discover beauty, her lays, her laws, and I sung them. Yes. But here, tonight, I am mocked by my youth, for in you it seems to me again that men are unfinished.' He looked up sadly. 'Why should you act less than human when you are to me human? Surely you must be; surely you try to trick me, to scare me.'

'If that were true,' whispered U-Ninth emptily. 'If that were true, then I should be contemptible, and blest.'

'I am not educated and cannot understand it.'

U-Ninth nodded. 'Sometimes I have told myself that my own grief is the grief of education. Do you think man is more noble without education?'

Adumbaba studied the face of the quieted computer, then looked down once more. 'Surely it is a trick. A face is a face and a man is a man. You are tricking me. But why do you not end this trick, man?'

'Here, damn you!' U-Ninth was excited and swung with the swivel of his chair, exhibiting the rear of his neck to Adumbaba. 'See those switches?' Two rows of tiny red, white and blue toggle switches were exposed there, and seemed to grow

out of U-Ninth's neck. 'These are emergency switches. I would take a fuse out of my throat to show you, but you've seen already what happens when one of my two fuses goes.' He swivelled back around, facing Adumbaba. 'Is that the neck of a man?'

Adumbaba gaped at the neck even though he could no longer see the switches. 'Gods,' he breathed, 'what do they do?'

'Everything, in an emergency. I am nothing without them. They are my arms, my eyes, my tongue, my mind. Together, they are my soul. Of course, I have no built-in Master Switch; that's in the drawer, here, and only Director MacNail can unlock and operate that.'

'It is madness,' breathed Adumbaba.

'It may be,' agreed U-Ninth. 'Man may well have been mad the moment he determined to make intellect his weapon. You are not responsible and are not even less mad to feel mad. Oh, you bewilder me. You set all my vibrations into a meaningless whirl.'

Adumbaba kept still.

'You claim to be a man who is dead,' said U-Ninth at length. 'If I have determined little else about you, however, I grasped full clearly the knowledge that you lied about shooting a man. I do not believe you could shoot any man; no, nor even remove the least useful bolt from my own feelingless body. Could you?'

Adumbaba watched and then grew alert to U-Ninth's startling concession. 'But do you think that man, M. Three, could not shoot a man, or could *he* not remove such a bolt from you? Surely you have heard enough about him to judge. Am I, then, he?' He stared eagerly.

At this moment, the door opened and Agent Templeback came hurrying into the room with a candle. 'U-Ninth,' he said, 'the Director is impatient. We need Mr. Three badly. We're having a time trying to calm his confederates. They won't shut up, they won't get out; the Director says it's a kind of agitation against SEA and only Mr. Three can stop it.'

'Well, I'm not through,' U-Ninth answered pointedly.

'The Director won't wait.'

'I have reason to suspect this man you have apprehended is not Mr. Three at all. You'll have to wait until I've proven the matter.'

Templeback looked narrowly at Adumbaba, then back to U-Ninth. 'Director MacNail won't like what you're proving.'

'Bah!' scoffed U-Ninth.

'Bah, fellow?' Templeback recoiled. 'I'll be quoting you on that.'

Templeback turned and walked from the room, leaving Reichstoopt to once again bring the door shut.

U-Ninth frowned after Templeback, at the closed door, and finally put the frown upon Adumbaba, but it wore off and he stared only with an odd expression which might have been a combination of curiosity and woe. Then U-Ninth put his hand over his eyes and leaned upon the desk. He sat silent, unmoving.

'And so,' he at last murmured, without uncovering his eyes, 'who are you?'

'I am Pernin Adumbaba.'

After a while U-Ninth said, 'But you did not kill any man. Who killed the man for you?'

Adumbaba opened his mouth and his tongue moved but he made no words.

U-Ninth uncovered his eyes and just managed to smile. 'You are a good man, aren't you? It is a strange thing. I wonder if I don't begin to see in you something of the beauty you have tried to see in even a piece of machinery, a thing born to compute and never to love. Are you really Adumbaba?'

Adumbaba gazed back at him.

'Adumbaba,' said U-Ninth, 'I wonder if the beauty you speak of does not lie in virtue. Tell me what you think. Is it not a good idea? For if beauty is in virtue, then even I may struggle after human beauty. Yes, it is a delicious idea. The virtue of man creates the beauty of man, and foolishness and madness and even wholeness be damned.'

Adumbaba shook his head. 'I do not understand what you say.'

'I say: I would be virtuous!' U-Ninth looked at Adumbaba severely. 'How? Tell me! What ought I to do?'

'But you are surely wiser than I. I cannot decide for you.'

'But damn it, Adumbaba, I'm not a *man*! My decisions are not decisions they are computations!'

'Then compute!' Adumbaba spoke with short weariness. 'Get up, walk from this place, do not return.'

'I can't!' U-Ninth yelled back at him with mechanical anger. 'I have no legs! I am part of this chair, damn you!'

Adumbaba's face opened to incredulity all over again and he looked now at the far edge of the desk, at U-Ninth's waist. U-Ninth wore a grey suit-jacket and a shirt and a tie and it had not occurred to Adumbaba that the computer might simply end a few inches beneath the top of the desk.

'No,' Adumbaba looked away, closing his eyes tightly. 'Do not tell me such things!'

'You find me horrible? You find me horrible? Is that it?'

'Yes! Horrible!'

'I see!'

The door was opened with such force that it went slamming back against the wall outside and M. M. MacNail came scurrying into the room, followed by Templeback.

'Well? Well?' MacNail scurried up to U-Ninth's desk. 'My favourite dribbler, Templeback, tells me you are in no hurry, U-Ninth. However, this lad's confederates are going around for the fifth time up there and they need a cautioning word from my son.' He stopped momentarily and glanced, as it appeared at his son, interposing, 'Comfortable, lad?' Then he allowed himself free intimidation again: 'U-Ninth, Templeback here suggests that you suggest that this man suggests he is not my son. Put it all in the suggestion box, I say, and get on with your work. Identify him now. You've had more than enough time.'

U-Ninth placed his hands upon the desk and his eyes upon Adumbaba. 'This man is not the agent, Mr. Three. I do not know who he is.'

'You say he is not Three?' demanded MacNail.

'He is not.'

'You have seen the evidence?'

'I have digested it.'

'And you say he is not Three?'

'He is not, for a certainty.'

'U-Ninth, you're pink,' MacNail said, nodding, shaking his head, scratching his head, slapping his head, chucking his chin, pushing at his eye, pinching his nose, touching his brow, then walking over to stand beside U-Ninth. He opened a drawer there, took hold of something inside it, winked at Adumbaba, sniffed at Templeback, said, 'Goodbye, U-Ninth,' yawned and pulled his hand back.

U-234²³⁵ all at once lifted a hand towards Adumbaba, then buzzed and there was fire in his eyes. Adumbaba cried out, raising his own hands. The flesh of U-Ninth's face went red and black and grey, the eyes sparked and shook and seemed to melt into colourlessness, the hands jerked and dropped to lay still upon the desk. The jowls sagged, the mouth straightened and lengthened, the dimple became a sharp deep dent. He looked not simply deathly pale as he had when Adumbaba entered the room; he now looked irretrievable. One cheek shone with a blue-black metallic scar. An acid smell steamed up. The eyeless thing slowly twisted, then froze.

'Order a new computer,' MacNail ordered Templeback. 'This one seems to have burnt out. Come along, Three, we're going back to my office. I hate office parties; this is the first one I've given, and it's got to end. I don't mind a little crucifixion party now and again, but these people act like they were drunk at birth. Be a sweet lad and assuage them for me; I've hardly been able to interrogate a soul in that bedlam.'

'But please,' Adumbaba stood up, still staring at the burnt-out computer, 'I am not Three. This man, this . . . he told you truly. Now, help him!'

'Son, son,' chuckled MacNail, 'you're not speaking to a computer anymore. You're speaking to a man. Your all too human, cherishable, perishable father. Besides, boy, that fellow with the code name of Cambyeses, he's told me plenty. Enough for me to give you the same voltage I just gave U-Ninth, if I

wanted to. I don't want to. You are my son. I worship the ground I walk on and want to share it with you. You will live to master my psychology; it's a promise, and I may keep it.'

'But,' Adumbaba pulled back as Templeback took his arm. 'What of this, this wretched thing behind us? Will he be all right?'

'I gave him the full count, Sonny,' said MacNail, a brief touch of sympathy entering his voice to join the cajolery of his face. 'Burnt his kidneys out. Had to. A machine has no right to come between father and son. Immoral, I call it. "Off with her head, said the Queen of Hearts!" What are you waiting for, Templeback? The Queen of Hearts?'

Templeback walked quickly from the room, but in tiny steps so that he would not put himself such a distance ahead of MacNail as to make the Director believe he was fleeing SEA.

3 RESURRECTION

The noise and shadows of the crowd in MacNail's office greeted the Director, Templeback and Reichstooop as they turned into the hallway, and MacNail, who had just been saying, 'Son, there are a few small favours I want you to do for me in Moscow,' shook his head in disgust and rolled his wrinkles at the group of agents who stood guarding the door and awaiting the return of the Director.

At the door, Adumbaba looked in to see the stew which madness was stirring. He saw that there was a cohesion to the party which had not existed when he left the room; for now Dysmas himself stood at the centre of the room, and about him were dancing in two circles all of the suspects whose arrests had emptied Lowland Hospital's Ward Seven. The circles moved counter to one another and, though many of the dancers were picking teeth, counting fingers, grinning, scowling and generally occupying the spaces in their minds as best they could, and though many were out of step, tune and balance, there was still a popular effort to meet and match the directions being given them by Dysmas, who waved his arms to guide

them in both their singing and their dancing; and the most of them sang with thumping cheerful voices, if with lyrics separate from their leader's :

*Mine eyes have seen the glory of
The coming of the wine
Oh, we'll sample out the vintage
Where the grapes of wrath are fine
For we have felt the lightning of
A terrible swift load
Should a body meet a body comin' thro' the rye,
We'll tak' another cup for Auld Lang Syne,
And one more for the road.*

The celebrants seemed sincerely remorseful as Dysmas tried to correct them, and set up a number of cheers for, 'Samson! Samson! Samson!' But no matter how many times he tried to teach them his philosophy, when it came time to act, they relied upon their tongues to speak for themselves :

*Mine eyes have seen the glory of
The coming of the law
It is trampling out the rights of man
But that's its only flaw.*

'Do something with them,' commanded MacNail. 'They haven't even got the sense to be afraid. Women, all of them.' He glared through a loving flip of wrinkles at Nump. 'I thought I chose *my* assistants well, boy, but you've outdone me. I've already hired three of them away from you. Now, make them end this racket.'

Adumbaba held his head. 'I can do nothing.'

'Son,' said MacNail more sharply, 'I love you. Adore you, I do. I'd do anything for you, anything at all. I concede that much. But if you don't start co-operating, I mean toot and I mean sweet, I'll send you to the parts department with U-Ninth. I'll dismantle you, disembowel you. You stand condemned, not accused. Be a good boy now, and silence them.'

'But what can I do?'

'You have a bad reputation, Son,' commented MacNail. 'Live up to it.'

Just then, Dysmas caught sight of Adumbaba at the door and, lifting his hands to the ceiling, he cried out above all the other voices in the room: '*He is returned!*' The circles slowed, the dancers stopped, the voices dropped. 'Adumbaba! Saviour! It is the Saviour!'

The midget, Heinrich Himmler, at once came crawling out from the inner circle, the first to go to his knees, and Dysmas was the next, who came all the way to Adumbaba on his knees, nearly falling over his tight skirt with each step, and he stayed kneeling before Adumbaba and said: 'I was prepared to give it three days.'

Observing the midget and Dysmas, the others began one by one to go to their knees, imitatively, and they crabbed their way towards Adumbaba, their heads down.

Adumbaba, unable or unwilling to contemplate the entire congregation, gave his eyes to Dysmas, whose hands touched his feet for the second time that night, and at last he divined something of the error which existed in his relationship with the bearded evangelist.

MacNail patted the black man on the back and said, 'Son, I am touched. I am truly touched. I do it with fear and you do it with hope.' He laughed, the laughter bypassing a brief seizure of epileptic wanderlust, itself a derivative of *Secondary Woe (Homesickness, West European)*. 'Maybe you should teach me psychology.'

Adumbaba tried pulling his feet from Dysmas, but the disciple would not have those relics withdrawn and followed with each step the Master took, lifting neither his hands nor his nose from shoes and floor.

MacNail stepped across Dysmas's head and announced loudly, for the benefit of the suddenly serene congregation, 'I am the boy's father, his spiritual dad. Makes me God, doesn't it? It's a good analogy, because judgement day is here for you people. I'll be giving interviews to the worthy lambs here; the rest are in for a shearing. You all must prepare for the examination we have for you. My angels here,' he gestured angrily

for his agents to join him inside the room, 'will guide you to the halls of heavenly examination. Bless you, my children, bless you,' and he kicked Simper's calf to urge him to the task, after which the agents began to pull gently at the lambs, two by two, leading them to the door, where MacNail now stood to give them a kind of benediction as they were removed; MacNail reached towards each with his hand, pontifically, and tried for all he was worth to smile blissfully, but the best he could come up with as he murmured, 'Bless you, bless you,' was a fairly merry plaid.

When the room was half emptied of its lambs, MacNail forsook the door to move with a few of his agents and with Adumbaba, who was followed by Dysmas upon his beard, to his desk at the curtain, where he sat down. 'It's good to be home,' he announced with shrill satisfaction.

'Please,' Adumbaba again tried to pull his feet free of Dysmas, 'please stand up, now.'

'By all means,' MacNail stood up on his chair to look over the desk. 'That man there, Templeback, get him up. He is unruly. Rule him. He must learn to worship me now. Rule him, Reichstoop. One line should do it. Vertical.'

Dysmas leaped to his feet. 'Crucify me, Pilate!' he cried. 'Better yet,' he touched Adumbaba's sleeve, 'crucify *him* again, for I would adore to be crucified beside him; particularly seeing how fast is resurrection these speedier days.'

'Ordinarily,' said MacNail, 'I would accommodate you, but just now I'm at a family reunion.'

'Oh, Master,' Dysmas took hold of Adumbaba's sleeve. 'Let us go now! Take me to your bosom and your home!'

Templeback instantly had an automatic pistol in his hand and he held it towards Dysmas, saying with tense softness, 'Play it cool, big guy.'

'It is madness,' moaned Adumbaba, pulling Dysmas aside and pressing Templeback's pistol away. 'Please; I have seen too much of guns.'

'Templeback!' shrieked MacNail. 'You're pointing that gun at me!' He leaned far to one side and fell over the arm of his chair, disappearing behind his desk.

Templeback swung about in a terrified arc, willing to point the pistol anywhere but at death. 'Just stand easy, everyone,' he said, and he stumbled over his own feet.

Reichstoop cried, 'No, Templeback, no! Please!'

Agent Cambyeses ran up, then, crying, 'A bow! A bow! Even a slingshot! For I smell blood.'

The agents who had been escorting the remaining lambs from the room surrendered that responsibility as they saw there was trouble at the Director's desk. Nump, seeming to decide that Adumbaba had to be at the core of the issue, lowered her shoulders and charged directly at him, but Dysmas lifted a huge fist and brought it down squarely upon her head before she could pour her bulk into Adumbaba, and she dropped the whole load of herself and lay still at Adumbaba's feet.

Agent Pebble had been running behind Claudia Nump and, as she fell, he tripped over her body, and Templeback, not certain who was falling or rising, said, 'Stand easy, folks. Am I the only one here with a gun, for Christ's sake?' and he stopped reeling his circle to hold his dizzy head.

'I've got mine out,' shouted Reichstoop, 'and it's pointed right at you, Templeback. So better you should stop pointing yours at me, or I will plug you.'

'Everything's under control,' muttered Templeback, going to one knee in his dizziness; but then he heard a hideous thin scream and looked up to see that MacNail had been crawling around a corner of the desk and once again had dodged away from Templeback's dizzy aim.

There was a shot.

'Gods, Gods.'

'Damn you, Templeback!' cursed someone.

There was another shot. Bodies dropped to the floor. The lambs still aboard began to stampede in a frenzied circle that skirted MacNail's desk. There was a line torn through the circle by feet that wouldn't be stopped.

'Who went out the door?' cried someone.

It had been MacNail.

'Master, where are you? Adumbaba!'

'Here, here,' answered Adumbaba, 'under the desk.'

There was still another shot. The stampeders turned and took their circle in the other direction. 'Stop or I'll shoot!' Feet ran by the desk, followed by more feet, as Dysmas crawled underneath it to join Adumbaba. 'Who was that who went out?' asked someone. Adumbaba said, 'Did someone go out?' 'Yes,' answered the voice; 'Where's Three?' Glass broke. A chair fell. 'Croesus!' shouted Cambyses; 'They flee!' Pebble peered under the desk and said, 'Ah!' and Dysmas's fist flashed out and Pebble moaned, 'Oh!' and fell flat. 'Don't shoot, don't shoot! I have children! I'll have more!' A shot. Another shot.

MacNail appeared at the door, trying to see through the storm. 'Son! Son! Where are you?'

Heinrich Himmler darted from a corner and threw himself at MacNail, with whom he seemed more or less evenly matched. MacNail and Himmler went rolling from the door, down the dark hallway.

A number of the lambs found the door and ran from it and their numbers rapidly thinned in the room. Reichstooop and Templeback were afraid to move or to turn their heads from one another; they kept a level unflinching aim each at the other, the two of them divided and protected only by the unconscious mountain of Sahara. Cambyses began to chase the remaining lambs from the room with war-whoops.

MacNail came running back into the doorway before long, dragging Heinrich Himmler with him. 'Son! Son! Where are you? Are you here? There's so much to do, I have big plans for you. And there are those favours you owe me. You will pick up a few things in Moscow for me; say you'll do it Get me October Man; and then, I want you to melt Lenin; and get Sholokhov to write a novel called *Quiet Flows the Monongahela*, tell him to get a few American cuties into it; and if Shostakovich would do a *Stars and Stripes Symphony*, we'll find him a Pulitzer or something—soap him up, you can do it; and get some of those Russkie D. J.'s to plug *Someday My Prince Will Come*, it's a sweet tune. Let go of me you damned lobster! Son, rename Leningrad *Kerenskygrad*—you know the city fathers, don't you? Make a circle out of Red Square.

Dam their plumbing, will you do that for your old dad? Oh, and buy me a case of caviare while you're there; there's so much to be said and so little, *oh, rats and tats,*' MacNail fell, tripped up by Heinrich Himmler, and once again they went rolling away from the door and down the hall.

Within the room itself, four candles burned on, two having been snuffed out by this or that breeze emanating from the ritual which now, like those two candles, had lost its fire and lost most of its personnel, as well. A few stayed to cling and cower along a wall or behind a chair, others lay apparently unconscious on the floor, among them a few agents; and the only sound heard in the room for some minutes was the scuffling of the midget and MacNail from outside. Then Claudia Nump muttered, 'Dirty pool,' lifted her sore head and her shoulders, her head bumping against Templeback's chin as she rose. Templeback's pistol fired wild, his head snapped back, he fell. Reichstoop said, 'Agent Nump, you saved my life,' but Nump herself, hearing the shot and seeing Reichstoop with a naked pistol, gave him an uppercut even as she rose. Reichstoop's pistol fired, and he fell upon Templeback. Nump looked numbly at the carnage, shook her head and looked again, mumbled, 'Death,' and fainted.

MacNail, on his hands and knees, came scratching into the doorway, the midget astride him trying to get his tiny hands around MacNail's neck. 'Lad! Three! Where? Oh, get off! Are you still here? I've sent a note along to Senator Priest, you know, and he's coming to meet you. Do you hear? Don't disappoint that kindly old gentleman, Son. Simper! Pebble! Reichstoop! Templeback! Where is everyone?' MacNail began to buck and at last managed to unseat the furious midget, who promptly tackled the Director all over again, and as they rolled out the door together, MacNail cried, 'Your Moscow contact, boy; his name is Dzhludakgorlaglasnahsmarksertsez-apornaryfopukhalbessonitsavaspalineyemlyokhkhkekhvetranah-yaospardryushnoitifazhoksudaragaodmarakshtozdelatshtobyutikhlabol Syp. Got that?'

And then there was a pounding and a thudding and the pounding and thudding grew fainter and fainter and there was

complete stillness. It seemed the two of them must have gone plummeting down a staircase.

Adumbaba and Dysmas crept from under the protection of the desk and stepped over the bodies and moved wordlessly into the hall.

The corridors were as empty as they were dark and, after searching for only a few seconds, they located the corridor which led to the door which led to the alley which led to a street.

They moved with stealth as dark as MacNail's hallways, and suddenly were two amongst many in the cold, windy, gaudy, auto-jammed, restaurant-lighted, jazz-seeping streets of New York. People, all of them walking on two legs, filled the pavements, strolling alone or perhaps in couples, and they were self-concerned and cheerful. Never had people looked quite so beautiful to Adumbaba.

'Do we go home?' asked Dysmas.

'You do not understand,' said Adumbaba. 'Home is far from here.'

'Do we go back to the United Nations, then?'

'Gods, no,' Adumbaba took him by the arm and they moved quickly into a passing group of happy laughing men who might have been drunk. 'I do not know where we go. I know we go.'

Chapter 6

1 NEWS FROM HOME

I cannot speak of all to happen after that man, M. Templeback, took not only myself, but M. Dysmas and each to the last of those living in Ward Seven at Lowland Hospital, to a certain dark building in the city of New York. I am not myself certain what happened there, for it was all of a few hours in a single night, and I was exhausted, and it was strange, and perhaps what I remember did not at all happen; perhaps nothing that I speak happened as I speak of it. Like a night-tale is that pigmy whose face danced, and there was a man who was perhaps a machine, and there was a battle which was not of wits, and all of these things may have been implements to coerce Mr. Three, to frighten me, to threaten me, like river gods come up from their magic tunnels to tell me: 'Go back from here, go back from this river, go back from this city, go home to your own!' I would gladly have gone home to my own if I could have; but even after I managed to escape from that unlighted building, I had no place to go. I dared not return to my hotel, where my name was Adumbaba; and I dared not go to the place I had come to New York in search of, the United Nations.

Now, M. Dysmas believed I was Jesus Christ, and I cannot explain it. Oh, Gods, it's true. I learned this finally and should have realized it earlier. Yes, this good friend, he was lunatic as all the others I had met in my travels, though I worried for him, seeing that his was at least the madness of love.

And so we escaped from that building, and we hurried from it, frightened at each step that we should be followed. We must have been followed, but were lucky, and fled from one crowd to the next in the chilly but still busy streets of the great un-sleeping city.

I did not know what to do with my bearded friend. Good

he was, but a burden to me, if he would persist in maintaining me in his dream. And yet, I felt some responsibility for him, for if he had contributed to my dilemma, he had also undergone with me adventures which he did not need or deserve.

Furthermore, that man had not done serving me and, observing that I had no idea of my direction, he at last asked me:

‘Adumbaba, do we seek refuge?’

‘Yes, of course,’ I answered not courteously.

‘My room is poor and I am ashamed, but it is a room, Adumbaba, and I can take you to it.’

‘Surely they will find your room,’ I said, referring to M. Templeback and the others who would fast become our swift and hungry hunters.

‘But I am not registered at my hotel by the name Dysmas,’ he told me. ‘I took that as my name in rebirth only tonight. The name I ordinarily use is Isaiah.’

‘Whatever your name, my friend, if you have a safe room, let us go there at once. Is it near?’

It was in the street called Eighth Avenue, and I have not felt the comfort of a room more quickly. It was bare, but it had a bed, a true bed, which stood beneath a picture of a Caucasian Christ which looked far more like my friend than myself. The bed I accepted with gratitude, I spread myself across a half of it and thought I might fall asleep as I settled, in that warm and quiet room. But I did not.

M. Dysmas I watched wash himself at a little sink in the corner, giving special attention to his beard, then drying himself and smiling at me as he meandered to a book shelf upon which he kept a single book. I believe it was the Bible, and for some minutes he glanced at certain of its passages and looked up from them to smile knowingly before proceeding to the next. Seeing him read reminded me of words, and I had a fast thirst for news.

‘My friend,’ I said, ‘where can I find a newspaper?’

‘I will find you one,’ he nodded, setting his book aside. ‘Let

me change my clothes, Adumbaba, for beards and dresses are rare companions in New York, making me a marked disciple.'

And so he removed his dress, beneath which he was naked, and then he got himself into more ordinary clothing, including a plain brown suit, and I could not get over the long sight of him in coat and trousers. He looked no more like Jesus, but what he may have looked like I cannot guess.

He left the room and before many minutes returned to me bearing a New York City newspaper which, only after looking into its inside pages, I found presented the article I sought on its first page. I tore it out so that I could refer to it as I might need to, only then learning that M. Dysmas had borrowed the newspaper from a nearby doorway. This was the article:

ADUMBABA REPORTED SLAIN

Rodriq Appoints Lumla

Albertville, September 10 (MMMP)—The Badoshian Government reported today that Premier Pernin Adumbaba, leader of the pro-Communist Badosh-Africa People's Independent All-Tribes Labor Party (BAPLATLP), was murdered by unknown assailants as he attempted to escape the house arrest under which he had been placed since the end of last month. According to a Government spokesman, the Badoshian Premier was fleeing with a member of the Russian Embassy here (but the official Soviet news agency, ACC, has denied this, reporting that Adumbaba was slain by 'Badoshian patriots' in a rebellion against what ACC declared a 'recognised effort by the Washington-dictated Adumbaba to sell out Badosh to Western imperialism.')

High Commissioner Enriq Rodriq was not immediately available for comment, but the Government spokesman made it clear that a new Government had been in the process of formation even prior to Adumbaba's flight, and that the head of the new Government would be former Adumbaba aide, Stajo Lumla. It was believed that the choice of Lumla indicated an effort on the part of Rodriq to appease ultra-leftists in the Badoshian Parliament, such as Communist Jaffm Vusupu, and at the same time to create a stronger rapport between his Government and Badosh. The BAPLATLP was reported dissolved in favor of the BATPICP

(Badosh-African Tribes and People's Independent Commonwealth Party). Presumably, Lumla and Rodriq reached an agreement on the aims of the new Government before the announcement.

Meanwhile, the death of Adumbaba touched off numerous violent incidents in Badosh and particularly in Albertville, where many of Adumbaba's closest followers have been arrested. In one incident, seven white soldiers of the Commonwealth Overseas Forces were attacked by a mob, three of them slain and their truck burnt. In another incident, a disorderly mob gathered before the Government House and would not disperse until fired upon, two of the demonstrators being killed and at least fifteen wounded by either gunshot or in the frenzied motion of the mob. In Maosville (Eastern Badosh), pro-Communist leader Vusupu was said to have used the murder as an excuse for launching a fullscale round-up of Adumbaba supporters in his district, as well as supporters of other factions.

White soldiers stood guard over all public institutions and took posts in many of the main streets in Albertville, already under martial law. In the tense city, many doubted that the appointment of Stajo Lumla would have the desired effect, since Lumla was an appointed and not an elected head of Government, and since the Adumbaba party stood dissolved and the aims of the new Government were not clear. The possibility of war, terrorism and the secession of Eastern Badosh hung close over the city.

In the United Nations today, several African leaders voiced harsh disapproval of the actions of the Commonwealth Government, and demanded an investigation into the death of Adumbaba.

I read that article slowly, many many times, before I at last set the newspaper aside. How long it seemed to take the news to reach New York City! Surely, the war would be begun by now.

The news told me little. It did not tell me if Lumla, dear Lumla, really sorrowed for me, believing me dead. It did not tell me which of my friends were arrested. And it was only after contemplating that article for a long while that I was given this idea by it: seeing that there were Africans in the United Nations in New York City, and among these were those

who mourned me and even wished there to be an investigation into my death, then surely I had sympathizers in this very great city. I resolved to find them!

I would visit the Kynkuland Mission early the next day; I would know no one there, but perhaps someone would know me. Yes, I took hope from the hope, and my mind had to smile at the irony that I—I!—had a Mission in this city which I did not dare to visit, for it would be no different from walking into the office of M. Rodriq at Government House. In hope, I determined to sleep, when I noticed that M. Dysmas had stretched himself out upon the floor beside the bed. I leaned over the edge of the bed:

‘M. Dysmas, what is it? Will you not come to bed?’

His eyes opened. He bolted upright. ‘You will permit it?’

‘You make a mistake, my friend. It is your bed and I am a man you kindly share it with. Do you understand?’

‘I do, I do,’ he said.

But he did not. I shared that bed with him, and we slept in light that night, having too recently been exposed to the acid touch of darkness; and just before he slept, I heard that M. Dysmas speak softly to himself: ‘He sets his body next to mine, and I unclean and leperous,’ which made me alert once again. And I came nearly to decide to sleep on the floor myself, but then, at last, I slept.

2 A WALK, A RIDE AND A RUN

In the morning, M. Dysmas sainted himself and made me the magic of his mysticism, providing me with oranges and bread and plum jam and a glass of instant coffee, tall and hot, and these foods I tell you I did relish; they were delicious to me. I had not eaten but scraps for two days, and so I ate slice after slice of bread and jam, and had a second high glass of coffee.

M. Dysmas also produced a morning newspaper, from which I learned that my dear Lumla had been arrested. Therefore, I knew that Lumla must have believed me dead and attempted

to perpetuate our party, must have at the risk of his life accepted my position within that party. And so he was arrested. The newspaper told me this :

Stajo Lumla, only yesterday reported new Premier of Badosh by High Commissioner Enriq Rodriq, was arrested at about dawn today (yesterday), accused of perpetrating the murder of former Premier Pernin Adumbaba, whose body, it was learned, was being brought back to Albertville yesterday (the day before yesterday), and was expected to rest in the capital today (yesterday), while others said the body would not arrive until tomorrow (today) or even later (or even later); clearly, there was no inclination upon the part of the Government to have the whereabouts of the body made public.

There was no official announcement of Lumla's arrest, but one was expected by noon, today (Tuesday), Albertville time. Presumably, Lumla, Premier for a single day (Sunday) (Monday?), had arranged the murder in order to succeed Adumbaba in the high post, but there were other rumors that Lumla two days ago (next Wednesday) had acted at the instigation of Moscow because of Adumbaba's so-called 'neutralistic dream' for a Free State of Badosh. According to these rumors, Lumla last week (Buy Bonds) acted as a yet more staunch supporter of the Moscow line than had ever his predecessor, Pernin Adumbaba.

(Meanwhile, the official Soviet news agency ACC reported the incident, describing Ex-Premier Lumla as the 'lackey' and 'tool' of Western imperialism, who had overseen Adumbaba's murder because of Adumbaba's so-called 'neutralistic dream' for a Free State of Badosh.)

Commissioner Enriq Rodriq could not be reached for comment.

Desperate grew my worry, and deliberate my mood, for good Lumla would not be held in such esteem by M. Rodriq as had been myself, whose body had *martyr* written upon it; no, M. Lumla would not be deemed of such value that his death would be expensive. And though that morning newspaper said nothing more of the tension in Albertville, still I know that city and knew the people were come to waiting, their energy leaping within them; they were angry.

'M. Dysmas,' I said, 'today I must do more than pray. There is much to do,' and I then tried once again to explain the truth to him, but he would accept one part of it only at the dismissal of another, and if I pressed the other back upon him, he reshaped the first, and came to see M. Rodriq as Pilate and the report of my death as simple if repetitive truth. He even found it reasonable that I should be dying and undying so quickly and everywhere. It was a unique reading of my troubles.

'But tell me, Adumbaba,' he asked seriously, 'who then is the pigmy?'

I sent him with the newspapers back to those doors from which he had borrowed them, thinking it most honest to give back what was left of that which was not ours; and then, stopping in the small, dingy lobby of that broken little hotel, we learned the location of the Kynkuland United Nations Mission, which was housed at the Kynkuland Consulate, and we set out.

Down Eighth Avenue we walked into Fifty-ninth Street, and here we crossed and entered into Central Park, and we walked in the great park for a long distance, perhaps a mile, before we left the park to move across Fifth Avenue, and in this way did M. Dysmas take me to Seventy-eighth Street and to the Kynkuland Mission and Consulate, which were housed in a lovely building of four floors, at one time I think a residence of New York City.

At the door I could only ask of the short, thin man, as black as myself, 'What is the name of the chief officer here?'

'Do you ask the name of the Consul?'

'Of the Kynkuland Ambassador to the United Nations.'

'Then, that man is Orfi Jabuisme.'

'And does Ambassador Jabuisme live here?'

'He does.'

'Then I must see him at once.'

'He now has breakfast. His office hours are from ten. And then, of course, you will have an appointment.'

'Oh, this is urgent!' I told him. 'Most urgent! Please!'

He looked at me and then at the tall M. Dysmas beside me. Both of us wore those curious wrinkled suits and, together, we must have looked odd. M. Dysmas smiled at the man.

'What is your name?' asked he.

'I am Pernin Adumbaba, man. Yes!'

He gaped at me. He put his nose to me so that I could not tell whether he tested me by peering or smelling. He looked at M. Dysmas once more. He became angry.

'You had better to go away,' he said. 'We will not enjoy such jokes.'

'I speak truly,' I told him, holding the door he attempted to close. 'Believe me!'

'The Ambassador is a busy man,' he struggled with the door.

'*Be at ease!*' spoke the loud and determined M. Dysmas, and he shoved his broad hand at the door and put his elbow to it, sending the door back and the man who answered it scrambled away, frightened. 'Be at ease, black heathen brother. There is work to be done.'

I was furious with M. Dysmas and told him to be still.

'Please wait here,' the man who kept a distance from us now told us, 'and I will tell the Ambassador you are here,' he paused at the foot of a grandly carpeted staircase to add, 'Premier Adumbaba.'

And then he hurried up those stairs.

'M. Dysmas!' I immediately turned upon my friend. 'Please do not put your temper or enthusiasm, either one, in the way of my work. Do you hear?'

'I am a simple evangelist and a man of action, Adumbaba,' M. Dysmas answered so gloomily and penitently that I could say nothing more to him. 'Forgive me.' He was perhaps a saint to me, after all, that man; but it was like remonstrating with the devil, scolding him, so that I suspect the devil is not much different from a saint. I gave it up, wondering what I should do with a man who loved me as another, but exhorted of me nothing more than that I should be gentle with him. I would have to rid myself of him.

These speculations I set aside as the Kynkuland officer returned to us, and escorted both myself and M. Dysmas to a special room, and here we were told to wait.

We did not have to wait long. I would have preferred to wait

longer than to have waited for those who visited us, who were not black at all, but who were two tall weighty Caucasian policemen, one of whom said as he walked in:

'This them?' and the other of whom said:

'Let's go.'

My protests were useless, they only served to make one of the policemen lock my wrists in steel handcuffs, and I wept inside and pulled at the handcuffs, and M. Dysmas, even after being manacled, fought, so that while we were dragged from the room and the building and put bodily into the police car at the curb, and even as we drove away from the Kynkuland Mission, one of the policemen had to give his whole attention to M. Dysmas, and at last brought out a pistol—oh, the world is filled with bullets!—and he trained the ugly thing upon both of us. This did not yet quell the explosive militance of my protector, but rather lighted some new fuse inside him; for he snatched at the pistol with both of his hands, snatched it right out of the hands of that policeman and next brought the butt of it down upon the shocked policeman's skull. That policeman was thus lost to the fray altogether.

Seeing this happen, his friend, who had been swerving about and touching at curb and pavement anyhow, at once brought the automobile to a stop and removed his own pistol and climbed from the car. It is surely to the credit of both these policemen that neither one came to the point of firing their pistols, and this particular policeman seemed mostly to have it in mind to keep out of arm's length of M. Dysmas, and perhaps to gather reinforcements.

M. Dysmas, too, climbed from the car, and the policeman looked at my friend in doubt, as if not knowing quite where or how to shoot that perplexing bearded saint. He chose not to and only backed away and, abruptly, I asked myself: 'Adumbaba, do you sit here?'

A crowd gathered but gave its attention to the policeman as he continued to retreat from the stalking theologian, and even that attention they gave at a nervous distance.

As for me, I left the car perhaps unnoticed, handcuffed

hands and all, and ran back towards Fifth Avenue and across it and into Central Park.

Through that bright morning-lighted park I crept, at first thinking to run, but then realizing that I had no destination for the running, and so I stopped running to creep, thinking this is the wisest immediate method of locomotion. And I did not stop at all to wonder about my poor militant friend, except to hope he would make his own way to freedom, for truly I felt safer without him. In this fashion, and by bush and hillside and bramble and grove, I made my way back to Fifty-ninth Street, where that park ended.

I managed to slip my suit jacket up over my head and down from my arms so that, though wadded, it hid my shackles; and then, doing my best to appear as if I always carried my jacket in just such a wad, I left the park to walk again among men, in the sudden eyefilled jungle of Adumbaba-eating things, frightened and placeless.

I walked one street and walked another, knowing I did not dare to stand still, for everywhere I paused in this city, it seemed, an arresting official waited. I passed many of these alert officers, or they seemed many and seemed alert to me; and walked for perhaps an hour before one policeman actually did try to stop me, saying :

‘Hey, Buddy; hold up a minute.’

I did not wait to learn how I had aroused his curiosity. No, I ran, and he ran, but I did not look to see him run but once, giving all my sight to the path ahead. I turned a corner, turned another, (then darted into an alley which ended at a brick wall and a wide door and, having no other recourse, I pulled back the steel door and entered a large room nearly as dark as the rooms in the building of the pigmy.

3 FALSE MANCHEGANS

New York City, I say again, was filled with arresting officers; yes, they may have formed half of its population. Perhaps the other half of the population served to be arrested; or no, not

yet half, for some sizeable proportion of the inhabitants of that city served another function, which was a curious one. These were the people who went by the particular name of Don Quixote de la Mancha. Having met one M. Quixote the preceding night, which meeting I need not recount I think, I was prepared to regard him as phenomenal. Meeting two men who chose this most peculiar of names could only convince me that the name bears a special importance which I, a foreigner, could not understand; and that it might even be that Don Quixote de la Manchas were strewn liberally across the American continent.

I was soon enough instructed, in the course of a walk I took with that second man, as to the source of the name and the glory which clung to it, which was a persevering moor, I was told, named Cide Hamete, or which was a certain right-handed Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra. Whatever his ancestry, I say, the city was to me, at that moment, fat with his progeny, for truly, I had rushed fleeing into a theatre for my shelter and, again somewhat creeping as I had through Central Park, I made my way to a stage where I met no one but my second M. Quixote, leaving me to fear for just one excruciating second that I had crept stealthily through some alley entrance back into Ward Seven itself.

It was not, upon that stage, so much different from Ward Seven, I thought; for this theatre, yes, was bereft of audience, but it was thickly populated upon its floodlighted stage, and most of that wondrously eloquent population was busy at rehearsing a drama. Their voices guided me to them, though I tried to remain with shadows.

The scene upon the stage was of a countryside, a rolling green, with a few trees to my side of the stage and a paper windmill, I think, to the other, at any rate a building with arms which slowly churned and creaked as the actors tossed off lines and gestures as easily and elegantly as they might sip wine in a fine restaurant. I have not witnessed dramatics at all, and as best I could be under my circumstances I was impressed.

Of all of these, one actor took my attention especially, so

comic were his dress and antics, for he kept his eyes cloudy and seemed, in his lines, somewhat less adroit than the others, and if I could not laugh at him and his friends, I could at least stand there with increasing ease, happy that I had eluded the officers and had no longer to walk in the streets, and even charmed in that I did not have to lurk alone in the open, as hopeless as I was helpless; or perhaps it is only that I wanted so badly to rest that I used as an excuse for it the charm of that actor with the pale moustaches who wore atop his head a pot, and upon his chest armour of not much more elevated function.

As I watched, that impoverished pot-wearer took his pot off and spoke to the assemblage, saying: 'Very well; let's try the Inquisition of the Books once more, and let's give it a little more jazz, okay? The Inquisition of the Books,' and he himself came off from the stage and stood beside me, and I backed away from him worriedly, dropping my jacket over my handcuffs and accidentally exposing them to him, whereupon he noticed me, giving me a mostly weary but not quite uninterested few seconds examination, with a more curious if still tired eye for my handcuffs (to which I reacted this remarkably: suspecting that nothing is less mysterious than that which is openly displayed, I made no attempt to conceal them again, instead bringing my jacket back up over my head and my arms back through its sleeves, and I lifted my hands and handcuffs in smiling salute to him, astonished at my own boldness; and that salute he answered by losing interest in me altogether)! Other actors also left the stage, one of them—a certain man in a kind of simple peasant costume—coming to stand beside myself and the pot-wearer; and this more simple looking man took much more interest in me and my handcuffs than had the other.

'Why, bless my soul,' said he, grinning, 'if I see right, and never mean to see wrong, your Lordship, wrong not being right or, where it is, right being wrong, babbling the species, which the generous God isn't likely to tolerate, we really have fallen upon a poor mortal in need of some succouring.'

'Silence, idiot,' the Lordship spoke quietly but firmly. 'The

critics love a modest tongue offstage, whereas yours trills on always in search of tomorrow, as if to make certain you were not so much selected for the roll as dug up for it. I'm sure the gentleman beside us can explain his predicament, and what can be explained has no enchantment, and has no need of me: rather, let us watch our playmates: here comes the game. In short, man, *clam*; dig?'

Unexpectedly, I took some hope now, for here I had appeared suddenly and inexplicably, a black man, manacled, and they were not startled by much or antagonistic; I wondered if I could appeal to them for just enough aid to free my hands in some way. 'Please,' I said, looking from the pot-wearer to the other and back again, 'if I may speak to you; please, if you would be such a lovely man,' and the peasant looked at me and so I looked to him, 'if you—'

'If you're looking at him,' he interrupted, 'and meaning to talk to me, or looking at me, and meaning to talk to him, it's no matter which, because neither one of us is lovely, and if loveliness is what you see, then my master's a fool at first sight, and we'll soon learn whether he's a fool at second sight, too, because if your eyes aren't enchanted, brother, they're sick, and in either case you have need of strong succouring. It's a fact they'd be better out of your head altogether than calling I or my master lovely, for though I am honest and he is wise, and valorous as his part obliges, lovely is one thing he has never been called, not even by an enchanted person.'

'I'm trying to hear,' said the pot-wearer without looking at us. 'Will you two mind your quarrel in some other corner? I don't find it as entertaining by half in my right ear as the actors make it in my left.'

'Please, Sir,' said I, and hurried to keep his attention by reaching quickly to his shoulder which, being made of metal, produced a rattling clank of a sound, and that clanking—produced by my handcuffs catching against his armour—was transformed into an odd jerking of his shoulders, then head, then torso, then hips, then legs, so it seemed I had startled him in one place and the surprise had leaped through him like contagion. In the end, he swayed and lost his balance and fell

crashing to the floor of the stage, much more to the amusement of the peasant who stood back and laughed happily at the fallen pot-wearer, than to myself who stood back fearful of having made a new and unneeded enemy.

I then went down to assist the man to his feet, whereupon he cried :

‘Hold off, impostor! Touch me not again with those false fingers, each of which is a mace in disguise most cunning. Touch me once more and, by the purity of Amadis, I will slice those heavy fingers from the cannon of your arm; by Palmerin, respected even by that priest yonder (as you will shortly see, if you observe our play), I swear it. For I am Don Quixote de la Mancha, whose name is synonymous with greatness and whose deeds have left all evil in trembles since the days of my first expedition, and I am immune to the devil’s disguises, and no dark spirit can touch me unless it be with cunning. Touch me not, but take two steps more backward, so that I may arise, and then, if you have the courage, face me directly, eye to eye and armour to armour, sword to sword and white knight to black demon, and you shall swiftly learn the meat of my renown,’ and while saying all of this, to my bewonderment, that man tried vainly to lift himself even so far as his knees. He could not. He at last accepted the help of the peasant in getting his legs, armour and head perpendicular to the floor, and then he glanced around wildly, at me, at the peasant, at the others gathering about us.

‘My sword!’ cried he. ‘For it will be the Demogorgon to this sorcerer, this Eutropa, let him transform himself into Dramusiande himself. My sword, Sancho! Help me find it, if you prefer living through another day with your selfless master, for you needn’t believe the appetite of this troll will be appeased at destroying me (however exhausting the labour). No, he will next put his fingers upon you and, I swear to you Sancho, they are fingers such as you have never felt before, each of them is a hammer. What is a knight to do with a squire who stands gawking idly while his valiant master is held humbled, weaponless, before the greediest wizard to smirk upon Christians since Circe bore Bacchus a son? Sancho,

where is Haemony, my sword! What, then? has he swallowed it? Diabolical magician, save these thaumaturgics for a more naive audience, because the Knight of the Lions will stand firm before the Black Mass itself. O, sword eater, do your worst! Don Quixote will not budge.'

In truth, this speech was fierce and fearsome, and all I could provide my tongue with were such words as, 'Sir, I have learnt all too recently how to retreat, and it is a philosophy I will now practice with feet that do not stammer, with your permission, and a philosophy I take it upon myself to recommend to you, if truly you stand in fear of me.'

'Hear him, Destiny, O, hear him!' shouted M. Quixote in agony, choosing to interpret my words to his performance. 'He advises the knight who has never yet flitted a lash at danger, much less turned from it, to play the coward. Sancho, if you for a moment doubted the enchantment of this man, if he is a man, or the conjurations of this sword-eating warlock, if he is an enchanter, don't, upon threat of tomorrow itself, doubt it a moment more, but stand behind your Don Quixote, who means to protect you, along with the rest of our dear company, from all the twenty million charms and lances at the disposal of this black plague come to take communion of our blood. Gather yourselves behind me, friends of my heart, for if God admits of its barest possibility, I mean to secure your lives to gentle perpetuation. And now you, Merlin, Comus!' He glared at me so that I was still less inclined to trust the whole of this to improvised fun. 'Beseige me. I am ready.'

I stood fast, trying to evaluate my ability to run from this mob if they took action against me.

'He seems frightened,' said the peasant then, 'which seems to be a point for our side. And, worship, as for my doubts about this gizzard's magic, it wasn't me, but you yourself, who mistook him for an ordinary gentleman in extraordinary circumstances. As for myself, when I see a man locked in handcuffs, I'm a little more than puzzled about it, and entertain a doubt or two, but I took your word that it was no enchantment, and this is the reward I've earned for my circumspection, but let's not quarrel about it now, because if he's really all you

say he is, I'll get behind you as quickly as you wish, since, although I can't help wondering why he doesn't enchant himself out of those handcuffs, I never have understood just how magicians operate, except to see that it's always with bad results for Sancho. And as for your sword, Sir, the bold magician never did swallow it, possibly because you're standing on it, and if you'll just move over one step, I'll get it for you, knowing how hard it is for you to bend yourself over, your breastplate weighing more than all that supports it,' and that peasant, M. Sancho, then reached down to lift the sword of the pot-wearer, whose feet moved too slowly, unless M. Sancho's hands moved too quickly in the anxiety animating them; in any event, he pulled not only that sword from under the knight's feet, but pulled the knight's feet from under the knight's knees, as well, and the knight dropped down again, this time yet more thunderously and rapidly than the first time.

Sitting upon the floor, he shook a fist at me and exclaimed: 'This round is yours, robber of justice, but Don Quixote's breath is the gauge of his valiance. Sancho, so long as you're just behind me, perhaps you will lift me once again to my feet. And this sorcerer will learn that it was a mistake to spew out the legendary sword of Quixote, for with it fresh in my hand, I daresay our adventure will come to a speedy and beneficial end.'

Sancho promptly got the knight to his feet, and armed him with the great sword, and there was no longer anything funny to me in this sport, which found me backing into a wall as M. Quixote approached me with that terrible knife.

'Don't do this,' I told the man then, not knowing whether my voice had in it anger against his sport or fear against his sword. 'I am sorry to have interrupted you, and will leave you now if you will return to your play,' and my voice perhaps went near to weeping, for how much of lunacy and flight can a man endure in such a long, quick conjunction of hours?

'Ah, and now,' he said mercilessly, leaning upon the handle of the sword whose point he gave to the floor, or seeming to

lean that way, for the blade did bend in more than one direction as he rested it on the floor, 'he shivers. Oh, but this is a wondrous moment in the history of immortal affairs,' and he half turned in his triumph upon his fellow actors.

'What do you say, Sammy,' one of his fellows said in a small voice, 'isn't that enough?'

'Enough indeed!' cried M. Quixote, raising an arm high, 'and mark this moment, you who have once or ever let the fool's oil of doubt make slippery your estimate of knight-errantry; mark this moment, you who have sullied virtue with the muck of disbelief; mark this moment, niece, who would have kept the very nape of history abed; mark it and see now whether virtue well armed serves a function in this world. For I, Don Quixote de la Mancha, am about to slay a crafty sorcerer who only naked seconds ago proposed to destroy me, my squire Sancho Panza, all of you, this stage and theatre around us and, for all I know, the whole Christian world. In his cunning, he knew that to destroy inimitable Christian morality, he must first destroy the indomitable Quixote. See now how far he has pursued his purpose,' and he turned back upon me, did he, to see that I had been edging away from him, along the wall. 'Squirm no more, dead magician, and attend to your soul, for your body will be patient while you do so, and will commit itself to the eternal with more advantage if I require from you a statement of your deep penitence. Proclaim your Christianity, villain, while you have within you the instruments of proclamation.'

Fear and anger welled in me and, my emotions swollen, I waited, my eyes closed, for him to finish at his game or me.

'Oh, Lord, and let the saints preserve us,' I listened to M. Sancho speak, 'for if they don't, my master will preserve us after the way of pickles, for here he is all excited with talk and religion, begging the gizzard to make a speech, as though a gizzard's wildest part wasn't his tongue. My master is enchanted all over again, no mistake, and I beg you, Don Quixote, to write his Christian epitaph yourself, perhaps next Sunday; but for now, be done with him, that's my feeling, and

mourn him later, since I have hold of a vision only five minutes away showing how you'll be floored again and this time Sancho, and not your sword, will sleep unseen under you. No, Sir, don't wait, that's my advice, because there's no excuse for scratching yesterday's flea today, if you understand; the other side of the coin may look different but won't get you a penny more of bread than the first; old enemies are always ready to become new friends; pretty words shine like gold but buy more trouble than wine; you needn't tell the devil how to get to hell; or, men swat flies while—'

'Oh, end it, Sancho,' scowled the knight, impervious to my own misery but irritated beyond describing at that peasant's chatter. 'One minute you ask me to bring to an end enchanter and enchantment, and the next you issue what is tantamount to a pardon by beginning a recitation of proverbs which would outlive me by ten years if I were willing to eat, sleep and bathe with them to the end. Sorcerer, speak! And do so without offence to me, my friends or to God, or the speech which is your last will be aborted with the rest of you. And mark you, don't be long; my arm feels the weight of this skirmish deplorably.'

I was relieved, suddenly, to hear a different kind of voice say: 'Come on, Sammy, knock it off. The guy's really scared.'

I opened my eyes and saw that M. Quixote was looking back at another man disapprovingly.

'Then,' I said after some moments, 'you did play with me. And this you think was amusing?'

M. Sancho shrugged and used a voice he had not used before. 'We didn't ask you to come to our rehcarsal, Mister, and you can't blame us for noticing a man in handcuffs. Anyhow, you shouldn't go around calling people *lovely*. You could get a pig-sticker in you anywhere if you're not careful with that kind of language.'

M. Quixote looked at me thoughtfully. 'Did you call me lovely? You recognize this? Now, I think,' that foolish knight was unwilling to surrender the game but I watched him with disgust only, 'you cannot flatter the fates, such silly pomp availing nothing. Howbeit, though, your silliness is encased in

a pretty knowledge, making me think you have some eye for poetry. I cannot believe an eye which sees my loveliness is all wizard, for though a wizard can enchant his words and make them rhyme and attain to a rhythm beyond all reason, so that ten syllable words rhyme syllable for syllable with four syllable words, so that death rhymes with life and hell with heaven, still prettiness is in the shepherd's eye, and is beyond the magician. Neighbour,' he dropped his sword, 'you are only a common man. Why did you come here posing as a wizard?' The zest was gone from his voice and manner both and I saw that, at last, his game was over.

'I am trying to think,' I told them, wishing my suit fitted better, newly ashamed of my handcuffs and general appearance, 'the purpose of all this. Somehow, you saw I am a man without your education, and so you called me fool, and thought it proper for the educated to mock the uneducated. Yes, a black fool, you saw, and not so clever as yourselves. How much fun to frighten me, to ridicule me, you said to yourselves. Perhaps I would even turn and run from you and out of the door; oh, this would make laughter for you! Yes, perhaps I would have run, too, I say frankly, but I am tired with running and as much afraid to run outside as to stand still here. Now you will please tell me something: did you receive from this humiliation of me all the pleasure you sought?'

There was no one to answer me. M. Quixote himself kept staring severely, blinklessly, at me, as if criticizing me for this attitude of mine, but he said nothing.

'Well,' said M. Sancho at last, his hands now behind his back, 'you'll possibly tell us just why you have those . . . ' he brought a hand forward and gestured and nodded towards my handcuffs.

I only snorted at him, 'You could not believe me.'

To which M. Quixote answered with a laugh and he put his hand on my shoulder, and this laugh and touch I felt must be the closest that man knew how to come to an apology, and he said, 'We will believe you, because we owe you a story. You got a key to those things, man?' He touched my handcuffs now.

I said, 'If you would help me to be free, I would thank you. It is enough.'

'We will, we will,' he said almost gaily. 'Sancho! Let's have a file, boy,' and then, as M. Sancho ran to fetch a file, I was encouraged by M. Quixote and the others to tell the story of my predicament.

Well, I thought to tell them the truth of all that had happened, except for the death of M. Three, thinking they could not believe but speaking, anyhow, and hoping that the telling would help the story make some sense at least to me. They listened, he filed, I spoke.

4 SAMMY APOSTROPHE AND SEMI-COMA

I felt painfully hesitant to take myself back into those streets again, but after he had introduced himself to me, M. Sammy Apostrophe (this was the very name of the second M. Quixote) took much interest in all I had told him. I had been freed from my handcuffs, and that young man (for he looked quite young once he had removed his armour, his moustache and the powder from his blond hair) said to everybody: 'Rehearsal's over. I have to cultivate an idea. Let's go have lunch, Premier, and get cultivated.'

And while we walked, I was instructed about the ancestry, as I have stated, of Don Quixote, though I remain vague on the subject; and was able to walk amidst a large group of performers going to lunch with us, so that I did not have to worry about arresting officers just then.

Within that jostle and jest did we go to a café only a short distance off, where the cast and I gathered at tables and along a bar for our lunch, the *hors d'oeuvres* of which and meat of which and sweets and fruits of which and surely the liquids of which were all alcoholic drinks; to which I attempted dissent, but they would not hear of it, saying it was hard on noon, that man could not live on beer alone, and such things. And so I was given a martini, which I found not at all unpleasant.

For some while, M. Apostrophe, next to whom I sat at the

bar, gave himself to the cultivation of his idea, slowly twirling his glass beneath lips a-pout and brows a-knit, and eventually, perhaps in a martini or two, he shook his head in discouragement. He looked up at the barman who stood mixing drinks nearby and this lover of games then began a game with him:

'I should really tell you a story about a troll named Whiskey, Max. It would make you close shop and hie-ball it to a monastery; which, by the way, is where this water you call gin belongs.' He turned to me and asked, 'Do they have martinis in Albertville?'

'In the houses of some men, yes,' I confessed.

'From underdevelopment to overdevelopment on the instalment plan,' he said, turning back to the barman. 'Max, I'll tell you what this is. It is three per cent gin and ninety-seven per cent hope. I was going to tell you a story about a troll; maybe something like that little pigmy of yours, Premier. You know what a troll is, Max?'

M. Max, the barman, shook his head. 'A midget?'

'Hardly. A troll is a species of goblin. They generally live in the basement. Max, if you wanted to see the Secretary-General of the United Nations, what would you do?'

M. Max shrugged. 'I got troubles enough.'

'Exactly,' said M. Apostrophe. 'We all have troubles enough. Don't you remember reading about trolls when you were a kid?'

'No,' the barman told M. Apostrophe, frankly.

'There you are,' M. Apostrophe turned to me. 'Overdevelopment. This man was born, reared and raised in a civilized country by a mother who wanted him to be a credit to her and all men everywhere. He goes to thirty-two schools and winds up mixing weak witchcraft which is meant to corrupt men's minds and ruin their families, but he's too cheap to even provide enough kick for corruption. How much do you remember, Max, of all you learned in school?'

The barman stopped drying his glass to seriously ventilate that question, whereupon he said: 'Jesus Christ, how would I know?'

'Well, what did you study?'

'Say, what's all this got to do with trolls?'

'Trolls?'

'You, you're nuts,' M. Max shook his head and moved away to set his glass beside a shining row of glasses, then came back. 'You got a twisted brain, Sammy. It's all unshaped.'

M. Apostrophe laughed at that and, in a scotch and water or so, M. Sancho, seated at my other side, leaned around to say, 'Tell the Premier about your philosophy, Sammy.'

'By God, I will,' said M. Apostrophe. 'Mr. Premier, you can't understand my country without understanding my philosophy, so gather this in. Now, everybody says, "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you." right? So no one does anything unto you. Right? Now, then, watch my hands, watch my tongue, watch my mind, for by the simplest arithmetic and no sleight at all, I will subtract more than half of that aphorism and improve it by half again: 'Do unto others.' You see? Ah ha! *Do unto others! Voilà!* And take educated note that, by the simple expedience of having removed the concluding phrase from that over-exposed little pinch of morality, its original passive nature becomes rousing, soaringly, active. Right? That's me and that's my country, Premier. We don't ask you to understand what we do, but only to let us do it. Do unto others! That's what I say.'

I stared at that man. I said, 'Do what unto others?'

'Anything, man,' he frowned at my slowness.

I did not understand. 'Such as what?'

'Such as anything,' he said in annoyance. 'Anything is better than nothing. Do unto others . . . well, that means be *active* with people, man. Right? Don't just let them sit there. If you see them, do something with them. Shake a hand, pat a back, loan a buck, sing a song. Let them know you know they are there; and let them know you're there, too. You dig that?'

I believed I had some idea of what he meant and so I tried to emphasize the agreeable portion of my vagueness, nodding just a bit.

'Sure,' smiled M. Apostrophe. 'Give and take. Communicate. What about you, Premier? You got a philosophy of life to take to the U.N.?''

'You mean, in what do I believe?'

'That's it.'

I nodded again, more soberly. 'Then my philosophy is my people,' I admitted, and abstractly and I can say almost patriotically I accepted another martini from M. Max.

'You mean you love your people,' said M. Apostrophe, letting his eyes roam meditatively about the bar, surveying remotely the many members of this cast who busied themselves at drinks, sandwiches or conversation at several tables. 'Is that it? You love people. Love thy neighbour as you love yourself. Me, I love me, and I'll tell you how I know it. I love me because, when I'm hungry, I want to feed me, and when I'm tired, I want me to sleep, and when I'm cold, I want me to be warm, and when I want a woman, then man, I want *me* a woman. Now, there's no one else about whom I can make those claims; consequently, I deduce it is *me* I love. I do unto others, Premier, but my worship belongs to me alone.'

I drank and contemplated those selfish words and decided he meant them seriously. Yes, it was an honest man's philosophy, and perhaps it was a lesson to me. Perhaps all men believed not much differently from this man.

'If I really loved people,' said M. Apostrophe martiniarily, 'I think I'd be a kind of god. A good god, Max, not a bad god.' The barman had been listening. 'You, Max, you're a bad god.'

M. Max nodded, gazing at the glass he dried, mumbling, 'Oh, boy.'

'I was telling you about a giant, wasn't I, Max?'

'A troll,' murmured the barman, setting the glass down.

'Same thing,' said M. Apostrophe. 'Same symbol applies. You're confused, Max, and just think how many details could be done away with if we could only collect all symbols and focus them upon a few central symbols in each phase of life. Take fear: a symbol. Take sex: well, everyone ought to, now and again, right? Sex, a symbol. The Bible could be condensed into an ad for the back cover of *Time Magazine*, then maybe people would have time for it. Also, it would be where it belongs. You dig me clear now? Think of all the books that

could be burnt after digesting them into editorials. Why, in India alone, they'd add hundreds of thousands of acres of desperately needed living space; it means *lebensraum* for the Germans. Max, did I ever tell you the story of the Indian Prince, Chankrishna and his grave?'

'You know me,' M. Max said, chewing now at a toothpick. 'I got no memory at all.'

'Sure,' said M. Apostrophe, 'he was the giant I wanted to tell you about. They buried him in a grave eighty feet deep. He was seventy-four feet tall, that's how it is on the records, and they buried him standing up, and oil started to pour out of his mouth, a real gusher. It was a pretty happy funeral. You look like you don't believe it, Premier. That's because you can't identify with Chankrishna. You can't, can you?'

'It is difficult,' I granted, a little thickly, but believe I added courteously, 'though they are good.'

'I'll tell you,' now spoke the half-cyed M. Sancho, who himself was hard at work building a fence of beer bottles, 'you talk too much, Sammy. That's my philosophy.'

M. Apostrophe waved the philosophy away with a sneering hand into which M. Max placed a glass.

'Everybody talks too much,' said M. Sancho. 'Does all the damage, first to last. Right, Mr. Premier? At first there was the *word*, don't you see. Or at first there was chaos. What I say is this: at first there was the chaos of words, which is to say that the first knowledge we have of ourselves is rooted in so much babble, and babble has been sprouting ever since. What do you think, Mr. Premier?'

I could not drink in his meaning.

'Babble; it's all the beginning we've got,' scowled M. Sancho. 'Take me, now. Where did I begin? Damned if I know. Don't remember my birth at all, if you want the embarrassing truth. Not at all sure I had a beginning. I wonder. Where, I ask you, gentlemen, did I begin?'

'It's where you'll end that entices me,' rejoined M. Apostrophe at once.

'Sammy,' M. Sancho resorted to his beer, 'your wit travels

all the way from La Rochefoucauld straight to the dogs, no offence.'

'No cynic, I, I beg your pardon,' M. Apostrophe retorted with scotch, they now making conversation directly around me and I followed it somewhat like a tennis match, though I missed the fresh air. 'For I reshape men's lives. I am an optimist.'

'But not yet Robin, harbinger of Spring,' said M. Sancho.

'Robin, no, but Wren, for I reconstruct,' smiled the other.

'Oh, wow,' chuckled M. Sancho, looking off and then back to M. Apostrophe. 'You must be Pound, because it's Greek to me.'

'I am Sterling,' I said here, struggling to catch on to this game.

'Again?' M. Apostrophe put his eyes just before mine and stared.

'Again?' I repeated.

'Far, man. Too far. No dig.'

'You do not understand?'

'I do not understand.'

'I do not understand myself.'

'No? What?'

'What is it you mean?'

'What are you talking about?'

'I do not know.'

'Then why keep talking?'

'I cannot remember which of us is speaking, therefore must keep hearing the sound of our voices,' I tried to translate an old joke of my people, but it made no sense to me now. Still, both M. Apostrophe and M. Sancho laughed easily and I was pleased to have made them laugh and drank some more.

'Hey, I want to ask you something,' said M. Apostrophe now, putting his hand upon my arm. 'All that jazz about loveliness and love. Too much, you know. You're rocky, Mr. Premier. You are, for real, like on the high seas. You don't know it?'

'What is it you mean, Sir?'

He whiskied some moments, then said, and his voice was like mine and thickish, 'I think I see in you a fellow knight who, sharing ideals noble, lofty, unarguable and all too delicate, are soon to be suckered. What I mean, Premier, is that you're nuts. You have to know that. That's what I want to know. Do you know that?'

I could not feel insulted by his words. To begin with, he had to piece them into place with enormous care, and I admired the effort; and, to end with, it took me more moments than that to understand the words once he had pieced them into their places. I was distracted, also, by my stomach, which was growing heavy as my head went light.

'Well,' I started, and then I felt myself begin to rely upon that word.

'Tell you what I'll do,' he squeezed my arm genially. 'Sancho, friend, hear ye my promise to assist this great African statesman. He wants to see the Secretary-General of the United Nations on business that will not hold. It will not, and time itself is an imperative. I must, of course, help him; for who am I?'

'Ah, you see,' M. Sancho grinned and nodded, 'at last you come to my question. Sooner or later, all men must come to my question.'

'Silence, now,' M. Apostrophe slapped that bar, then lifted his hands, swinging around, commanding attention and quiet at once. 'Gentlemen and ladies, do unto others. It has occurred to me finally: in all tragedies there must be a flaw, for happy endings are the rule. Therefore, I say, the Premier here made a mistake during his first assault on the United Nations Building. Yes, he erred certainly, because why are buildings there? To be conquered! And why conquer them? Because they are there! Now, I have found the flaw, and he himself gave me the clue.'

My cloyed mind did its best to give him eager attention.

'When first I saw this man, he was handcuffed, and what did he do? Observe what he did?' He lifted his hands again. 'He exhibited his embarrassment to me, almost as if to boast of

his chains. Therefore, gentlemen and ladies, I looked at him no more. But did he employ such openness in his efforts to achieve the summit? He did not. He crept, he stole, he brewed shadows with care, he made silence and kept doubt clutched to his breast. Now then, mark me: he should have marched boldly, confidently, past the guard, asking no questions, and if the guard had stopped him, he should have stated with assurance such words as, "*Ooglubby hokumoku mowgli burp.*" *Voilà!*'

All applauded this critical essay well, but for myself who, when the applause had faded somewhat, said, 'But you see, they would not let me pass through that gate.'

'And did you say, "*Ooglubby hokumoku mowgli burp*"? You did not! You said, "Please." You begged where you should have barged.'

'But there was the guard.'

'Now picture this,' he said, rising from his stool, though he could not stand quite erect for some seconds. 'See! lady,' he gestured to an attractive young woman sitting at a table by the bar, 'you are the guard. I am Premier Adumbaba of Badosh. I march up to you. I say, '*Ooglubby hokumoku mowgli burp Security Council eight o'clock gubbygubby!*' What do you say?'

That pretty woman, martini in hand, stood up and curtsied very sweetly to M. Apostrophe and she said gently to him, 'Lose thyself.'

'So be it,' said M. Apostrophe, who took the martini from her hand, drank it at a tip, set the glass upon the bar and pointed at her. 'You will direct me *gubbygubby*, that means quickly, or you will direct no one henceforth. And look, I have a mind to report you for drinking at the gate.' He swung about to face the rest of us. 'This does not show it. But I think you can see that if all of us march with the Premier here upon the United Nations, we must obtain for him attention and an audience, somewhere, somehow, with someone, and that will be a beginning. It will also, I venture to say, be rather fun. Gentle host, honour me! Be you with me?'

And then many arms flew up and there was a lovely commotion and a fine big resounding, 'Aye!'

And seeing the fun of it myself, I flung up my own arm loosely and cried, 'Aye!' as well.

5 A KIND OF PRAYER

'Oh, my Master!' cried M. Dysmas. 'Oh, Adumbaba! My Adumbaba! Yes, I expected you, I knew you would not separate yourself from he who has found you. You are come for me.'

I glanced unthinking about the ward. How empty it was. The night before, nearly every bed had been occupied, and now nearly every bed was bare; there was here only M. Dysmas and myself, and the beds were covered only by pieces of coarse white linen, and a few of them were bare to the mattress, tan and discoloured.

Of all of us who had marched upon the United Nations Buildings that afternoon, but one person was to be brought to this place: it was myself. I had what was called a *record*, and if the police who arrested me seemed unaware that I might be hunted by more important officials than themselves, still they felt a deep responsibility towards the relationship they had already established between myself and Ward Seven at Lowland Hospital and, as if taking me home, they did not pause at the police station I had visited once learning my New York City address.

The others, I believe, were fortunate. They were considered mere drunken actors, which after all is what they were, who had carried a performance too far from their stage. They were rowdies, due only for a few hours in which to meditate and to become sober. They were not strange muddleheaded black people who claimed to be Premiers of foreign states, after all, being content to be Don Quixotes and Sancho Panzas or, as M. Apostrophe would himself say, relatively harmless personae upon the stage of this particular century. In defence of his inherent fidelity to himself, his philosophy and even to me, I

must say for M. Apostrophe that he made a splendid speech on my behalf (indeed, on the behalves of all of the Premiers of newly developing African nations who might be expected at any time to shinny up those glass walls of the United Nations Building), but still I say for him that he spoke for me all the way and to the end, and very literarily, and if he was not yet so distressed as myself, it can only mean that he was less positive than I was that I was the elected ruler of a nation.

As for my poor, unhappy, beautiful M. Dysmas, he was not strapped to his bed, having apparently been on good behaviour, and meek, and thus he was free to come to me on his knees, which was the only way he had of pleasing himself; and he wrapped his arms about my legs and wept for joy. I set my hand upon his head, perhaps no longer so sure myself that I was not Jesus Christ and nearly felt myself administer unto him a blessing; but of course the truth is only that I was discouraged, deeply, and in need of all the consolation that I could share with any man. I was most terribly discouraged. It was not because of my second foolish defeat at the gates of the United Nations. It was not that I had been brought back to this awful, this lonely and sick, room. It was because I had had an opportunity to purchase an afternoon newspaper of New York City as we went, a band of troublemakers, against the United Nations. Now, I did not read that newspaper until I had some minutes to wait at the police station, when I opened it and read the following article from its first page :

TERROR IN BADOSH

Lumla accused, executed

Albertville, September 11 (MMMP) — The brief and hectic career of Stajo Lumla came to an end this morning, when he was executed after an all-night trial in which he was found guilty of planning and directing the murder of former Badosh Premier Pernin Adumbaba, who was attacked and shot by unknown assailants earlier this week. Mr. Lumla had been the most prominent of a handful of Adumbaba aides, and the obvious successor to the late Premier. Last night Commonwealth Commissioner Enriq Rodriq, scarcely twenty-four hours after appointing Lumla

to the position of Premier, made an announcement through official channels which charged Lumla with murder, conspiracy, treason and bad sportsmanship. There was no immediate clarification of the charges.

It was feared that the death of Lumla, following closely upon the death of Adumbaba himself, would signal a new wave of terror in this faction-ridden nation, where several parties have been battling the BAPIATLP (Badosh-Africa People's Independent All-Tribes Labor Party) for supremacy since Adumbaba's death. At one point, it was announced that the BAPIATLP had been dissolved in favor of a party with closer allegiance to the entire Commonwealth structure, and it is not known whether either of these parties are functioning in torn Albertville today.

In Albertville itself, Goqqu Tebrou's GTCT ('Goqqu Tebrou and Capital Too') strongly pro-Western party seemed to gain most from the deaths of Adumbaba and Lumla, and it was a common diplomatic hunch that, with the most powerful leaders of the BAPIATLP out of the way, Mr. Tebrou was certain to become the next Premier of Badosh. Some pointed out, however, that all of Tebrou's support exists in Albertville, and that the appointment of Quantico-educated Tebrou would be bound to inspire dissent in Eastern Badosh (Maosville), governed by the dissolute and avowedly pro-Communist element led by Peace University graduate Jaffm Vusupu.

Meanwhile, the Soviet news agency ACC reported that Badoshian 'hero' Stajo Lumla had been 'framed and murdered by the dissolute and avowedly pro-Yankee bandits of the GTCT in Albertville.' Moscow predicted that the 'Washington-dictated appointment of Tebrou' would mean the secession of Maosville 'according to our blueprints.'

Services for Stajo Lumla will be at the Little Chapel of the Antelopes. No flowers.

**(YOUR DAILY DIME, STILL FIRST IN PICTURES!
SEE PAGE EIGHTY-FIVE FOR A FULL PAGE OF
PHOTOS OF RECENT AFRICAN SLAUGHTER!)**

I am a man who has fought with his brothers. I have been stricken and I have struck. I am a man who is terrified of fighting, I confess this, but I have fought. I have seen black blood soak rich green grass and turn it death downwards. I

am a man who watched children bleed and die. And, yes, I have been frightened and ridiculed and hated, and also loved. I say with honesty that, after reading this news dispatch, I dropped to the bottom of my life. I had not the strength to resist anything any longer. My heart said, 'It is over.' I was uncaring of what the police did to me. I was uncaring as I was removed from the station alone and brought back to Lowland Hospital, even knowing that it could not yet be over for me, for I was of Badosh and had somehow to regain my rage and my hope.

I set my hand upon the head of M. Dysmas as he greeted me in Ward Seven, he who thought me another who he loved far better; and holding my hand there, I felt myself bless him and felt myself bless all men through him, for all men are unhappy and I wept for everyone. This is how I pray.

Chapter 7

1 A LAST SUPPER

Magut MacLeach MacNail was giving a party.

It was a Goodbye Party for Agent Templeback who, as the guest of honour was given the chair at MacNail's own left, a chair usually left vacant, just as was generally the chair at his right, for security purposes. Such an affair as a crucifixion party, however, was grand and rare, and restrictions were somewhat relaxed, so that MacNail had sold even the seat to his right, where sat a special guest, Senator Frank Priest, who was in spirits nearly as high as MacNail himself.

More accurately, MacNail was in an unspeakably bad mood, for the flight of Mr. Three had not for a moment departed his consciousness; but he couldn't let this bad mood interfere with his enjoyment of a crucifixion party, which were uncommonly gay both at table and at the do-it-yourself floor show which always followed. It seemed, indeed, that the only individual not thoroughly enjoying himself at the candlelight table laid in MacNail's own office was Agent Templeback himself, who sat glumly scratching at the cast of his broken arm and touched neither toast nor lemon water, though he flicked his nostrils now and again towards the pickle relish Senator Priest had brought along to the party.

'Eat up, my boy,' MacNail patted his shoulder lightly and Templeback shivered. 'Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow,' but MacNail thought about it, then concluded more impatiently, 'You've been with me a long while, Templeback. Don't let's part with a fuss.'

'Right,' murmured Templeback, but there seemed less conviction in his voice than usual.

'Emulate Senator Priest, here,' MacNail loudly advised

Templeback. 'See what a fat and happy man!' Then he whispered privately, 'Better yet, emulate me,' and as if to show Templeback the pleasure in that advice, he created for the condemned agent's eyes alone a brief sentimental display of sepia, umber, partridge, cocoa, cinnamon, hazel, sorrel, and squeezed out a tear fuchsine, another salmon pink, and he finished with a cheekful of butter and a chinful of waffle batter, all of which somehow looked like pugnacity and smelled like lemon water. Templeback's smile was plainly plaintive, displeasing the Director, who was weary anyhow with having recently regaled Senator Priest with two-hundred and twenty-five variations on the themes of Lugubriousness, Obsequiousness, Virulence and Oblivion. 'Can't appreciate it, Templeback?' snapped MacNail. 'You're finished.'

He returned his attention to the gayer members of the party and to Senator Priest, who was just then proposing a burnt toast toast, 'to the one American of our time who has remembered the first American values, who doesn't blow with every wind, a hard man in a hard job trying to keep a hard head so that America stays hard. A hard man, Friends, with a hard eye and a hard nose, a hard tongue, hard lungs, hard heart, hard kidneys; a man who sees the soft threat from without, because America is in danger, Friends. It's in danger of becoming soup, soap, pulp, mush, mash, wax. There are those who want to boil America into squash, roll it into dough, they want to knead it, Friends; knead a pasty pudding from Portland to Portland. Friends, I'm proud to drink to the man who will never let that happen; now, Friends, I mean myself, and I don't think I'm being immodest, because I want you to know where the arteries are hardest. I'm going to keep this nation hard no matter who tries to melt the steel of the American dream into the sewage-lining of foreign domination; you get me, Friends? I would be less than honest if I didn't make some gesture to that man; just happens to be me. Don't make a mistake, Director MacNail. I see for you a great future. But don't make a mistake.'

MacNail, who had been indulging in jocularity, enchantment, jubilation, altruism, puppy love, tenderness, bravado and

pickle relish, and nudging Templeback to bring his attention to the Senator's speech, had, as the Senator stated who he had in mind, allowed his façade the freedom of mumpiness, dumpiness, mordancy, vengefulness, denunciation, funk, grit and xanthic acidity; but recovered swiftly, he gave himself to stupor, servility, ennui and malaise and lifted a piece of toast and joined the Senator in his gesture. He relieved his inner turmoil somewhat by stepping upon Templeback's shin as he drank.

'Right,' murmured Templeback remotely.

The agents, on the whole, were enjoying themselves without making an exhibition of it, trying to derive as much entertainment as they could from the abundance of toast and the often pictorial dialogue of their Director and the Senator. Only occasionally did the new man, Agent Cambyes, forget himself and throw out a half-hearted war-whoop; the dark, silent but stormy displays MacNail created in response to Cambyes' forgetfulness always brought those sudden cries into mute immobility.

'I'll tell you,' Senator Priest was close upon being jolly as he ate, 'I've never regretted the support I gave you, Friend Director. I'll tell you why, and frankly. I don't trust you, and you don't trust me, while I recognize your power and you mine, and I think you understand what I'm saying. Why, I said to myself the first time we met, "Here's a man I wouldn't trust with ten cents," and sure enough, when you left my office, I found a dime was missing from my vest.'

'Prove it!' hissed MacNail, every wrinkle lifting hackles.

'I said to myself, "That's the man, if the word fits." My very sentiment. I wish someone would take note of these things for the books; no culture, that's the trouble with this country. Distrust! That's the flag I wave, Friends.'

'Still,' MacNail felt argumentative, 'a man who doesn't trust others isn't likely to be trusted himself,' and he snatched at a wrinkle, bared an eye and lifted a brow at Senator Priest.

'God's truth, Friend Director,' laughed Senator Priest. 'That's God's truth.'

'You wouldn't even trust yourself,' said MacNail, hiding his eye in exasperation.

'Now, Friend Director, you're going too far,' and he laughed again, broadly. 'Trust is relative, after all. That is, I'd trust myself more than my mother, but I'd trust her more than my sister, don't you know; and I call that optimism, because it's got form, it's got shape. And I'd trust my sister more than my cousin, or my cousin more than my nephew, who is a real crook, I'll tell you, you put your money on it. Trust is relative, Friends, it's relative, and the closer the relative, the closer the trust, till it gets right down to being so relative that you see it's yourself you're weighing out, and right then the form brightens, heaven and earth are one and harmonious, trust blossoms. You could nearly call it faith at that point.'

Senator Priest smiled so contentedly at his exposition that Agent Simper softly clapped his hands together, which applause ended as he caught a curt ruffle of wrinkles to the left of Senator Priest.

'No,' the Senator grinned and he put out a staying palm at Simper, 'no Sir, Friend Agent, don't go squeezing your grease on old Frank Priest, because he won't soften. He won't soften, he can tell his enemies from those he merely doesn't trust, because, Friends, I keep those enemies permanently listed in a series of little books old Frank keeps double-locked,' he tapped his brain and his heart, 'and no grease will remove them, and if I tried to tell you all their names and gave you just a few of the details of all those indebtments, why, I'd challenge in verbiage the Bible itself, not excluding the Apocrypha, and it wouldn't be much clearer, either. But hush your hearts, Friends, don't be uneasy, Friend Director, don't take my words as incurable misanthropy. No, Sir, I regard myself as a hard and civilized individual and more than socially suited to the likes of this two-fisted world, to the unbendable unbreakable fist on this side and the waiting, teething, seething world of fists across the seas; in a word, that is, I think I'm curable. I'll tell you, though, the balms, salves, pills, tonics, oils, syrups, opiates, prophylactics, physics, I mean the *works*, Friends, the whole range of remedies man has put forward so

far haven't softened me a wee mite nor at all, nor have they cured anyone else of anything. But Friends, you take it as a sincere measure of old Frank's hardheaded optimism that he's constantly trying new restoratives, and means to continue his search until some big medicine really succeeds in transforming his misanthropy into benign imbecility. Now, Friends, I believe I have described an optimist who needs more than the ordinary soft sell to soften his cells. I'm not about to be tranquillized by agents foreign or domestic.'

Senator Priest beamed. Agent Simper looked at him shyly. The other agents tried to make smiles at Director MacNail. MacNail came up with a cloudy majolican red. Templeback muttered, 'Would it do any good to say I'm sorry?'

'As for distrust,' Senator Priest leaned on the table, shoving a toothy smile about, 'it's just the most patriotic emotion there is, that's all. Nothing on earth, no emotion, can challenge it. It's number one on the hard heart parade, Friends, always has been. I love it, you love it, he loves it; first, second, third persons, no one trusts any of them. Shouldn't. Take it from the beginning, with the traitor, who no one trusts—why, Friends, such a man is callous!—this is the fellow that coolly betrays his origin, and you bet we distrust him, but it doesn't stop there, does it? No, because patriotism and distrust come in degrees; the idea being a man may rape a strange land, but never his own, or a strange girl in preference to his cousin, or a cousin in preference to his sister, or his sister in preference to his mother or, of course, his mother in preference to his father. What I'm saying is, there's a real protocol for this sort of thing, admitting it's unwritten, but I claim that everyone knows it and, for the most part, bows to it, you folks included; and rightly, too, for not since Cronus has a father been substantially raped, and the only thing to follow Cronus has been history and, Friends, ourselves, and so far as I can see, we began with distrust, founded ourselves in distrust and will flounder without it. You see, Friend Director, old Frank's ideology begins at the beginning of man himself, and it's indestructible. What have you got to say about that?'

MacNail refused to comment directly upon the words. He

was angry with Senator Priest, for it seemed that the Senator was making an attempt to counter-impress his agents; but, trying to remember that the Senator was a paying guest, and seeking neutral ground, MacNail planted in his face chrysolite green, wisteria blue, pansies, plums, raisins, bice and lice, bits of hawkweed and marigold breezing furtively through the mottled striae of the MacNalian meadow, and Senator Priest sneezed loudly.

There was a silence, broken by the small voice of Pebble, who said: 'Bless.'

Nump snorted and mumbled, 'Death.'

Senator Priest looked at MacNail with, not surprisingly to MacNail, distrust. 'I'd hate to think that marigold was a gesture, Friend Director.'

MacNail clacked his tongue and graduated into the more acceptable neutrality of greys pearly, dun, silver, ashen, zinc, slate and dappled, refusing however to look at the Senator. The party, in fact, seemed to have lost its quickness and delight and MacNail suddenly turned on Templeback and said, 'Let's get it over with.'

'Sir, though,' Templeback said softly, 'what about my cast?'

'You want me to autograph it, boy?' asked Senator Priest, looking around at Templeback interestedly before asking MacNail: 'Do you really crucify them, Director?'

'He lost Mr. Three for me. Imbecility, yes. Mistakes, no.'

'You really do, then. Well, I sure wouldn't want to be the one to trust you,' Senator Priest sat back thoughtfully, tapping at the table with his fingers. Then he chuckled abruptly. 'But damn it, man, you're *hard*.'

The telephone rang and Gibber hurried to MacNail's desk to answer it. It was Agent Polyp, who reported that Mr. Three was back at Lowland Hospital. Gibber instantly transferred the report to MacNail, who stood up and gave the information two seconds of smugness, sufferance, mockery, tenacity, diffidence, hysteria, caution, vigilance, aversion, evasion, indulgence, sycophancy, ochrous aureolin, apricot, peach, cranberry, lobelia, gooseberry, prickly pear, Prussian blue, at which point he seemed to reach the end of his wick and his face began to

tremble so violently that Senator Priest shot up from his chair, knocking it over, and ran off from the table and the Director; an explosion seemed imminent, but instead the wrinkles and folds heaved suddenly, pathetically, sadly; they sagged, they lay still. MacNail, involved in a personal and professional triumph in the presence of Senator Priest himself, whispered, 'My son. It is my son, Templeback. He forgot where the building was and came back to me by the only road he knew. Didn't forget his old dad. Can you think what this means, Templeback?'

Templeback clutched at the edge of the table. 'For God's sake' he said shakily, 'tell me.'

'Templeback, I loan you your life.' He looked at Templeback, sniffed, clenched his wrinkles. 'Three and a half per cent. I wish I could do more for you.'

Templeback closed his eyes, bit his tongue, held his breath, exhaled and said, 'Right.' He took in his breath and sat erect and reached down the table for a piece of toast.

2 THE PLODIGAL LETU'NED

MacNail, urgently wishing to get back to work, led his agents in a not unduly sentimental chorus of *For He's A Jolly Good Fellow*, during which he guided Senator Priest to the door, bade him farewell, set Reichstoop after him with a candle and then assigned Claudia Nump to fetch Mr. Three from Lowland Hospital.

Returning to his desk, he watched in excellent spirits as his agents began to clear the table. Templeback was the last to sit there, gorging himself hurriedly with toast and pinches of pickle relish with his one good hand, frowning as his plate was pulled away by a gleeful Agent Cambyeses. MacNail was reflective and only watched and waited.

All at once, Agent Bernhard had burst into the room. He announced: 'I have Three!'

MacNail opened his wrinkles in astonishment. 'I thought Nump was bringing him.'

Bernhard waved into the room a rather fat Chinese man, giving the Chinese a shove until he stood directly before MacNail.

MacNail stared at the Chinese man, then at Bernhard. He took up the candle from the desk and held it high, looking more closely at the Chinese man, for a minute studying Bernhard's prisoner closely. The Chinese man blinked rapidly and his lips started to move but he didn't speak.

MacNail set the candle down and sat back, gazing at Bernhard. 'I want you to know, Bernhard,' he said, 'that I'm in a good mood just now.'

Bernhard licked his lips.

'I just postponed a crucifixion, Bernhard. Do you think I'm mellowing?'

Bernhard gave the Chinese man a rueful examination, as if trying to determine his connection with MacNail's mellowness.

'Templeback!' MacNail watched Templeback as he hurried, still chewing at a crust of toast, to stand beside Bernhard and the Chinese man. 'Bernhard thinks I'm mellowing. What do you say?'

Templeback chewed slowly and looked at Bernhard, then at MacNail. He licked a finger and said, 'You are a poem, Sir.'

'A poem?' MacNail set to twiddling his fingers. 'Now, that's not clear, Templeback. Don't be ornate. Why am I a poem?'

Templeback gave Bernhard a nasty glance.

'Give me a poem, Templeback,' MacNail stopped twiddling. 'Let's have an example. Make it rhyme. Make me a poem about my mellowness.'

'Poem,' chuckled Templeback, scratching nervously at his cast.

'Extemporize,' ordered MacNail.

'Right,' said Templeback. 'O sight of the night . . . O fright of the light . . . tight blight . . . I don't know much about poetry,' and he chuckled again.

'I'm not mellowing,' said MacNail. 'Bernhard, this man is yellow. Does that constitute wit?'

Bernhard stared.

'My son is black.'

Bernhard frowned and puckered his mouth, then explained what he had learned from the Director himself about the usefulness of disguise and dissimulation, and it was also the Director who had implied that the only complete masters of these arts in all the world were, except for MacNail himself, a certain Mr. Three and a certain I. B. Bulsht. Consequently, Bernhard had been careful to look for Mr. Three in just those places that were the least black. He hit upon Chinatown and discovered this man in the very act of spying through a keyhole.

And then Bernhard paused a meaningful moment, swallowed, smiled and said, 'Okay, fellow,' he tapped the Chinese man's arm, 'tell Director MacNail your name.'

The Chinese man tried to speak through his working lips, but they worked too hard.

'What were you looking at through the keyhole?' demanded MacNail.

'Wife,' the Chinese man got his lungs into his throat, and blew a word out.

'A man who would spy on his wife would spy on his wife's sister,' explained MacNail. 'What's your name?'

'Tsu Li,' answered the fat man.

Bernhard laughed in triumph. 'He's bold, he is,' he said. 'Comes right out with it. Brazen is what he is, Sir.'

'Bernhard,' said MacNail, wagging a finger and shaking his head, 'don't.' He put forward for Bernhard's particular inspection a few tired folds of *Modesty (Or Else, 7-B)*, then gave his face back to the Chinese man. 'What did you see through the keyhole, Tsu Li?'

Tsu Li frowned, he shook his head. 'Not saying.'

'Stingy, I call it. I think you know where Peking is, Tsu Li?'

'Down in Bowely,' answered Tsu Li. He gestured furiously, waving both hands. 'Nevah go myself, nevah!'

MacNail said, 'Tsu Li, I want a detailed map of Chinese Communist activities in this country. Who is the Big Boy, Tsu Li?'

'Englis' impahfik,' Tsu Li again shook his head. 'Not unustahn so well.'

'Don't know anything about spies, is that it?'

'Not know anything 'bout spies, is it,' Tsu Li affirmed.

'You hear that, Pebble?' asked MacNail of Pebble, who had strolled over curiously.

'With both ears,' said Pebble.

'Do you believe him?' asked MacNail.

'Only insofar as you find a sediment of truth settling about the nondescript earth of his man's statements,' answered Pebble carefully. 'About like that.'

'I call him a liar,' snapped MacNail.

'Exactly,' whispered Pebble.

'Tsu Li,' said MacNail, 'you'll boil. Who is the Big Boy?'

'Big Boy?'

'By God, you talk or we'll boil Buddha himself.'

'Buddha?'

'Never heard of Buddha either, I suppose,' MacNail snorted.

'Well, your mother says you have.'

Tsu Li shook his head. 'Mama die long 'go, Tsu Li doh' go home China. Blake Mama haht.'

'Wife die tomorrow, Tsu Li don't go home Bowery,' retorted MacNail. 'Blake wife head.'

'Ah, is good,' Tsu Li smiled and he bowed. 'Good news. Many thanks.'

'Damn you, Tsu Li,' MacNail commented shrilly. 'you're not co-operating. If the truth won't help me, then lie a little, but give me something to go on. What are Peking's plans for New York? More specifically, what are Peking's plans for me? You don't know? Well, I say you do know. Does he know, Templeback?'

'You bet.'

'I never bet!'

'Straight ahead,' whispered Templeback.

'I warn you, Tsu Li,' said MacNail as Agent Reichstoop wandered into the office, 'I mean to have my answers, and I always get what I want. Is that right, Reichstoop?'

'Others do when you don't,' said Reichstoop, who then turned back to the door.

There was a stirring in the dim office. MacNail seemed to

sniff at the air. He lifted his hands for silence. Reichstooop came to attention. Tsu Li looked questioningly at Agent Bernhard. Cambyeses giggled. Simper scratched nervously at Templeback's cast. Pebble watched Gibber watch MacNail.

In another moment, Agent Claudia Nump had walked in, escorting Adumbaba and Dysmas, who were led directly to the desk.

Tsu Li looked cheerfully at Adumbaba: 'Better be ca'ful *hih!*'

Adumbaba stood stiffly before MacNail and began, 'I tell you, Sir—'

'Nump,' MacNail interrupted almost sweetly, 'do you see that I always get what I want?'

'You usually find your way into the apple,' Miss Nump conceded begrudgingly.

'More poetry,' MacNail's voice frowned. 'But I'll dictyl your dactyls, Nump. I'll tickle and sickle you, I'll pickle your knee-caps and bottle that poetry for posterity. I'm plain tired of you, Nump.'

'Shut your mouth, you nasty little scorpion,' retaliated Nump with a yawn.

'Sir,' Adumbaba began more loudly.

'Hardly words to be mistaken for affection, are they?' MacNail asked Nump, but he looked next at Adumbaba. 'Never mind. You've brought my son back to me. Travelling with the beard again, was he? That seems to say it for you, my man. Son, welcome home; no, don't say a word. No exertion is needed in identifying this Chinese gentleman at your side as a Peking agent, just give it a nod, and let me look at you. Son, you've lost weight. Oh, I'm happy, yes, I'm really happy. Boy, I have to do something nice for you. Well then, I'm giving you Reichstooop. Will you be loyal to my son, Reichstooop?'

'I was born to follow,' said Reichstooop promptly. 'Just show me the back of something, Sir.'

'Swine,' said MacNail. 'I'm taking you back. You'd be useless to my boy, you trade in one loyalty for the next as easily as you clean your bowels, and I think I'm complimenting you. What is it, gentlemen? I feel tension here. I think I see what's

in the wind; yes: you men *envy* me. Is that it? I have a son and he's come home to me and you envy me,' and MacNail attacked the problem with resignation, depreciation, lethargy, repentance, yellow fever and heartburn, dispersing the lot with a small flurry of blushes. 'Do you envy me, Templeback?'

'Right,' gambled Templeback in a tentative voice.

'Do you envy me, Gibber?'

'Oh, heaven forbid, Sir?'

'Please, now, let me speak.' Adumbaba tried to intrude.

'There's some confusion here. I see your concern.' MacNail retired thoughtfully into himself, reappearing in a few moments to state: 'From one point of view, it is safe to envy me. I want to be envied; great men are bound to be envied. From another point of view, it is not safe to envy me. Envy is ambition's first cousin. It implies want. I don't want you to want. Want not. Yes, I see your concern. What should the answer be, Pebble?'

Pebble began to cry.

'It's all in semantics,' said MacNail. 'What is envy? Does envy mean to covet? Miss Nump, do you covet me?'

'Death and turnips,' grunted Nump, turning away.

'I see.' MacNail tried to recapture her attention with an irritable rattling of his wrinkles. 'Well, I'll marry you one day, Nump, and we'll have it out. Shut up, Pebble. Tsu Li, you've been identified. You're on your way to the vat.'

Tsu Li beamed, bowed and said, 'Glad help; many thanks.'

'Oh, go give him an examination, Bernhard,' said MacNail. 'If he scores less than two per cent, send him along to the Mississippi office, they're always looking for new faces down there. The celebration's over. I'm glad you're back, Son, but we can't carry on all night about it. What are your terms?'

Adumbaba, who had resigned himself to waiting and taken to gazing at the rug, looked up. 'Do you speak to me?'

'I do, yes,' said MacNail. 'Your terms, boy, what are they? What did Bulsht ever pay you? I'll double it. Strike that. What did Bulsht ever pay you? I'll consider it. No use trying to corner me, Son. I'll fight you down. I'm a rat and a rat fights when it's cornered. Am I a rat, Simper?'

Simper's face twitched and paled and he looked at Pebble, but Pebble was still drying his own tears.

'No answer for it?' asked MacNail. 'Never mind, Simper; you're tired. You'll get a rest. Am I a rat, Gibber?'

Gibber started. He studied MacNail's multi-intellectual face worriedly. 'If you had whiskers,' he began softly. He stopped himself and said even more softly, 'But even then,' and then he went silent.

'Gibber, you're,' but MacNail suddenly wheeled on Reichstoop. 'Ah ha! So that's how it is, eh, Reichstoop? You're finished!'

'Sir?' Reichstoop looked over.

'Never mind. The curtain was back and I caught my own reflection. Take note, however: no one looks at me that way twice and, by Satan, I'll cremate myself if I ever dare to give myself that particular kind of superciliousness again. Accident. Went for fatherly anxiety, came up with superciliousness. For all that, Reichstoop, you're finished. I never go back on my word. Son, I don't hear you bargaining. What's your price?'

Adumbaba's thoughts, since having been returned to the hospital, had been away from New York and towards Badosh. It no longer seemed to matter about the Secretary-General. Lumla was dead. The people had neither a leader nor a party. Soon there might be no road left for Adumbaba to travel back into his country. Surprised, now, to have the pigmy put terms upon him, and not knowing what the terms signified, nor what kind of terms were expected, he wondered if he dared to speak of requesting assistance in getting back to Albertville. No, surely that would not be sensible, for it was clear that the pigmy had no interest in seeing Adumbaba walk anywhere freely.

'Double-silence!' exclaimed MacNail. 'Same thing as double-talk. Meant to confuse me, meant to drive me down. Won't work, Love, and either you name your terms or you're basted and baked. I'll have Nump adopt you; worse than being cooked; she eats into you like acid. What is it, boy? You want me to start the bargaining? Cagey old Three! You've been at the bargaining table before, is that it? Very well, here's my

offer: the British Isles and Iceland. Take Belgium while you're at it. Glad to be rid of it. Britain, Iceland, Belgium and Nump. That's my offer. Generous, I call it. What do you say, lad?'

Understanding neither side of the proposition, Adumbaba was alert only to the geography of it. He said, 'Badosh.'

'Badosh?' MacNail pinched down the folds at his right eye and gave Adumbaba a glint of cornea.

'Badosh!'

'Son, are there resources there I don't know about? No, no, it's impossible. Let me give you Britain, Iceland, Belgium and Nump. You're making fun of me, is that it?'

'I must go to Badosh!'

'You want Badosh, do you?' MacNail drummed uneasily at the desk. 'I don't understand it. I don't like what I don't understand. If you'd said Monaco or Nice or something, I'd at least see some reason in it. No, no, you must be joking; why, there aren't even white women in Badosh, Love. You'll be lonely.'

Adumbaba waved MacNail's words away, impatient. 'What must I do to be returned to Badosh?'

'Well, at least let me throw in Nump. Let me throw her in and I'll give you Liberia as well. What do you say? Is it—'

Adumbaba interrupted, crashing his fist to MacNail's desk: '*What must I do to be returned to Badosh?*'

MacNail was dumbfounded. His mouth was still agape with the words he had been about to speak and the lips flapped loosely for a few seconds until he could think to bring them shut. Pebble stared in fascination and horror; he had seen the source. The other agents stared in fascination no less, for they had seen the Director interrupted. Templeback and Reichstoop backed off, their hands inside their coats. Simper tried to back away but his brain had lost communication with his feet and the feet stepped slowly up and down without taking Simper anywhere.

Dysmas, himself startled at Adumbaba's militance, murmured: 'Badosh must be heaven.'

MacNail cursed and said, 'Sonny, that was an unpleasant experience.' The many nights, all of them moonless, which

were passing over his face seemed to verify his analysis. 'Very well,' MacNail snapped. 'You're finished, Simper. Washed up. As for you, Three, you've pained me. You've humiliated me. It hasn't gone unnoticed. It may be you've tried to intimidate me, and it's a thankless thing, sharper than a serpent's tooth, it is. A father's duty is to punish an unregenerate son. I'm taking back Britain, lad; it's for your own good. I'm also taking back Iceland and Belgium. Keep Nump. As for your payment, Son, you get Badosh. Not an inch more. Take it or leave it.'

'What must I do?' Adumbaba demanded tightly.

'That's more like it,' MacNail said, and went on rapturously, 'Oh, won't Bulsht be in a tizzy when he sees Lenin all melted. Son, I adore you. Simper, you're not washed up. Go wash up, then get a chair for my boy.'

Simper rushed to find a chair for Adumbaba, but Adumbaba took no note of it, standing before MacNail's desk as the Director pulled a file from a drawer and began to read off the list of assignments Mr. Three was meant to complete in Moscow. Adumbaba couldn't tell which of them might have what significance to whom. He studied the prepared list as MacNail handed it to him, and studied the old photograph of Rutherford B. Hayes, whose image was to replace that of Lenin.

'Later on,' said MacNail, 'I'll get myself in there, but for a few years yet secrecy is everything. Love, you're sure all you want is Badosh? Let me give you five dollars or so. It will make me feel better.'

'Tell me something,' said Adumbaba, looking up from the list. 'You believe this is the way to serve your nation? You are serious in what you ask me to do?'

'Too much for you, Three?'

'It is madness. As for killing the man, M. Bulsht, I tell you I cannot do it. I cannot kill a man,' but the words dropped off Adumbaba's tongue and seemed to fall to the floor and belong there; for he wondered if, now, he could not kill men. Badosh warred. Outsiders waited, seated upon the branches of the world's trees, smelling at profit. He looked back at the list.

'Always let secondaries open the arteries, is that it?' MacNail's hand felt for his chin and, in a moment discerning it,

he rubbed it thoughtfully. 'Secondary Gibber, pack your bag.'

'Sir?' Gibber looked from Adumbaba to MacNail.

'You're going to Moscow with Three. *Po Russkie govorit* talk Agent Gibber, eh, Gibber?'

Gibber waved his hands feverishly: '*Nye ponimayu, nye ponimayu!*'

'While you're there, Gibber,' MacNail said, 'you'll murder I. B. Bulsht as my son directs. Do it well, Gibber, and stop tearing at your knuckles; it will be a vacation for you. Perhaps your last one, so enjoy it. Son, I'm delighted, really delighted. Are you sure all you want is Badosh? Let me give you three dollars or so. It will make me feel better.'

Dysmas said quietly, 'Master, do we travel across the world now? And to the centre of atheism itself?'

'Not you, Moses,' said MacNail. 'I give Gibber to Three, Three gives you to me.'

'Please, Mistuh Big Boy,' smiled Tsu Li, bowing, 'give Tsu Li someone else also. My tuhms simple: Blooklyn.'

'Take him away, I tell you, Bernhard!' growled MacNail.

Bernhard escorted a contemplative Tsu Li from the office.

'Now, this is dishonourable,' said Adumbaba. 'This man, M. Dysmas, he must go free.'

'Conditions?' MacNail sat up. 'Conditions, is it? I thought it was all settled on Badosh.'

'And what will happen to this man?'

'He'll eat as well as the rest of us till you get back,' MacNail answered tartly.

Templeback belched.

Dysmas took hold of Adumbaba's hand. 'Adumbaba, leave me not in hell, but take me where you go. It is my life!'

Adumbaba looked fiercely at Dysmas. 'Why won't you understand? I am not your life, no, but the life of others. I am not who you think I am.'

'You are not Adumbaba?' Dysmas winced.

'Yes, of course I am Adumbaba, but—'

Dysmas went to his knees and kissed Adumbaba's hand.

Adumbaba's eyes were aglint and he spoke madly through

his teeth: 'What would happen to me if I did not do what you want me to do?'

'Reject my terms, you mean?' MacNail braided his wrinkles. 'Indescribable, indiscreet and impossible. Nobody rejects my terms. Never been done.'

'You would not let me go free?' asked Adumbaba. He listened to the soft irresolute chucklings of the agents and thought of the bearded man at his feet, and thought of the impossible agreement with the pigmy, and thought of Ward Seven and of politics, of the United Nations and the world, and thought of Don Quixote de la Mancha II, who took off the mask of his sentimentality to briefly apostrophize: '*Me*.' He thought of Badosh. Adumbaba pulled his hand free from Dysmas's grasp.

'I will go.'

'Hurry home, Son,' said MacNail.

'Adumbaba!' cried Dysmas. 'Take me!'

'My friend,' said Adumbaba to Dysmas, 'your life appears to me to have been a long wait. In me, it has not ended. This stranger offers you good treatment. In fact, it is more than I can promise.'

Dysmas stood up slowly, blinking.

'Dysmas, is it?' asked MacNail. 'Is that his name? Well, Dysmas, you need a shave.'

'A shave?' whispered Dysmas.

Templeback nudged Dysmas. 'Don't be elaborate,' he shook his head.

Dysmas looked at Templeback wide-eyed, turning slowly to Adumbaba, then to MacNail. 'Right,' he whispered.

1 SOVIET TECHNOLOGY

That cycle had recurred, as I feared it would, which began at the United Nations Building, progressed through the corridors of Lowland Hospital and sent me speeding into the offices of the pigmy; but this time it spun me with such ferocity that I went flying through the air and back across the sea. Clearly, what opportunity I might have to escape United Nations, hospital, pigmy, assignments and all could come to me only after I had left the great, black, phoenix-like aeroplane called the *Brute II*, for I was constantly in the company of the pigmy and of others before my departure.

Yes, it took an entire day to fix the details. I had to memorize my assignments, including the interminable name of the contact who would meet me, and I had to learn the art of falling in a parachute (I was given forty minutes for this), which was awful, and then I had to endure a farewell meal of an ascetic nature with the pigmy, who seemed to regard me as some kind of fellow tribesman, or blood brother, or blood son, or whatever it was.

The hour at last came for the flight.

I was dressed in a shining silvery suit which made me think of what a space invader might look like, and M. Gibber, an American agent who was to accompany me on all of my assignments, was dressed the same. We both wore tight black helmets. M. Gibber saluted those standing on the field as the black jet stood readying itself for our take off, and so I saluted beside him, and then —never seeing our pilot—we crawled into the great bird and waited. The thought that I would crawl back out of that fuselage only into space itself, with at least fifty thousand feet separating me from the earth, so sickened me that I could not speak at all; nor had I any wish to speak to

M. Gibber. It did not matter; that man was a ghost, and forlorn, and had nothing to say to me or to any person.

The flight was a long one and a brave man might have slept, but I could not sleep. The fidgety M. Gibber now and again dozed for a few minutes, then woke up grasping and trying to get hold of something, and a few times he got hold of me. And so I shook him off.

We were signalled by the flash of a little green light at the moment we were to prepare for our jump. It meant we had five minutes before a red light would signal us to leap. We now had to attach wire cords from a line inside the aeroplane to our parachutes, which we did; and next we had to force back the small door. The dark reach of cold space was an infinite chasm all about us; the strange, shrieking cry of the jet engines assailed my ears. What had been for hours nearly silence was just then a lightless and empty and bottomless hell, filled with horrible screams, and it was as if I could hear the dead body of M. Three himself screaming as he fell from the lower, slower aeroplane over Africa.

I wanted to ask that man, M. Gibber, to push me, for I needed courage, but I saw that he was himself so frightened that he had covered his plastic mask with his gloves. I closed my eyes and threw myself out of the plane.

I fell. I have never felt my body feel so strange. I was not frightened. No, I was frightened only when I was caught up sharply by the opening parachute, then given such a jolt that I feared I had hit the earth without it. I was dizzy for a time, then, and felt myself floating downwards; but oddly it was only now that I truly took fear from my descent, for I had the sensation that I was floating down too quickly. I did not wish to hit the earth with such a velocity.

I scanned the darkness for another parachute but saw none.

And then, how will I explain it? Why, there was a thing to so mystify me that even my fear was overwhelmed. My fall slowed, jerked; and I stopped descending! Yes, I stopped, and even began to rise a little, the wind becoming all at once strong underneath me, tossing me from side to side as it played with me. I would rise a few feet, perhaps—it is impossible to judge

distance or motion accurately in such a condition—and then settle back atop that nearly stationary updraft. It was incomprehensible. While I was thus blown hanging in space, mortified and terrified, I was surprised to see M. Gibber drift quickly past me, dropping, so near that I could see his face, which was unmasked now, and with what shock did he stare at me as his parachute, just beyond the upgoing current which pinned me to the sky, dropped past mine. I am sure I looked at him with equal shock, not knowing whether to be jealous of him for going down, or whether he should be jealous of me for staying where I was. Soon his parachute had become a blurred spot of white going grey far below me and then he vanished altogether. I remained where I was, struggling futilely to kick my parachute from the updraft.

The vista, I observed, was glamorous, as I was resting from my struggles. There surely can be no word but that for it. The sky was so clear that the yellow, blue and white stars pulsed alive like the eyes of ten thousand night beasts. There was no moon. Below, all seemed darkness for a long while, but as I accustomed myself to the downward pitch, I caught sight of some vague greyness which flickered now and then, as if throwing back specks of starlight, a milky way seeming yet more distant than the one above me. I thought it must be a city.

I struggled again from time to time, but one cannot kick free of the wind, this did I learn from my experience that night. Instead, I remained thus suspended as the dawn, a round lead wall whose pores opened to pale greens and finally to white, snuffed out the blackness and pinched at the stars and tugged at the sun. The dawn fused flecks of African roses and yellow wildflowers, giving the white more brilliance, and the sun was at last dragged to the tip of Eastern hills so distant and far beneath me that they seemed only rolling greens, and there in broadening daylight did I windily hang. The glamour of night yawned and wrapped itself now in the warm and gorgeous vitality of morning and, truly, I had never witnessed such whole, serene, unalterable beauty. Frightened I was, and hungry, and cold, but to such beauty a man even upon heaven's gallows will pay court.

Below, the vague white was vague still, but I could make out in the endless sloping shadows there some thin lines that might have been streets, and perhaps a river: a twisting line that reflected a sparkle of first sunlight every few minutes or so.

Studying the morning and the city, having long given up studying my predicament, I was suddenly dropped! my stomach churning, brain reeling; either I had slipped out of the updraft or it had itself abruptly died: but I was descending, descending, descending as if I had never been delayed, and again I grew frightened at the speed of my fall, and also at what were more and more surely the signs of a city—yes, a great one—beneath me. I wondered where M. Gibber was, but most of all wondered where I was going.

Yes, this was the great city of Moscow set into an unlimited frame of green and brown plains broken by splendid long highways and long curving roads, and I had a number of minutes to examine it more and more closely as I dropped. As in New York City, here there were great buildings though far fewer of them, and surely not so high, and not closely crowded together. I noticed that many buildings looked yellowish alike, and unexpectedly like gigantic skyscraping temples, a strange appearance for buildings in this country, thought I, which I had heard stood opposed to religion. The city did indeed have a long, twisting river traversing a part of it, and it had fine broad avenues with many automobiles and buses already moving through the morning of them, and I watched a gleaming blue train leap up out of the earth to cross the river at one point, and then it went back into the earth again after stopping at a small station, or at least it looked small to me. I tried to see where I would fall, but it was impossible because, as well as moving down, I was drifting across the city with considerable force. Oh, I was certain I would die if I should have struck against the spire of one of those church-like star-capped towers, but fortunately I blew past two of these, twisted about the city like the river along which I could now see a few small boats or barges, and before long I dropped directly over

the top of a lower building, grey and black-marble-edged, foreboding of wall it was, and I fell into some courtyard within its walls, and hit the ground hard enough so that I felt a few moments of pain in my back and hips and one leg, and I lay sore and let the parachute fall over me, waiting until I could at least sit up to massage my afflicted centres.

I finally threw back the parachute to see where I was, and standing beside me, in the cool shadows of morning, were perhaps half a dozen men.

I grimaced as I tried to stand, and one of them helped me. I said a stupid thing; perhaps not knowing what to say in such a circumstance, and sick and giddy of mind, I weakly said, 'Excuse me,' speaking in English.

'Think nothing of it,' said that man who had helped me, also in English, and he now assisted me in adjusting my cold uncertain legs to the earth. 'You are Three?'

That seemed a strange greeting to me. I had not, after all, expected to land in the centre of a city; but then I thought that they had perhaps got hold of M. Gibber, who had told them to expect me. But then, why had they not looked for me with helicopters, and how could they have been so patiently waiting in this courtyard for me?

'I,' said the man, very helpful, for now he helped me to be free of the heavy parachute which pulled at me, 'am Dzhiludak-gorlaglasnahsmarksertsezapornaryfopukhalbessonitsavaspalin-eyemlyokhkhkehkhvetranahyaosparbryushnoitifazhoksudaragao-bmarakshtozdelatshtobyutikhlabol Syp. It is a curse, isn't it?'

'Thank you,' I said. I nodded. 'I know you. You are my contact.'

'That is true,' smiled M. Syp, as I can only think of that man. 'I am also, unfortunately, a spy.'

'A spy?' I repeated, unable to detect much astounding in that kind of admission any longer.

'Three, I am a counter-counter-agent.'

'A counter-counter-agent?'

'An agent, that is, for my country, who is in fact serving a foreign power, which in fact he is doing in service of his own country.'

I waited, expecting him to carry it one step further, and then caught his meaning, exclaiming: 'You are a *spy*!'

'As sure as my name is Dzhiludakgorlaglasnahsmarksertsez-apornaryfopukhalbessonitsavaspalineyemlyokhkhkekhvetranah-yaosparbyushnoitifazhoksudaragaobmarakshtozdelatshtobyut-ikhlabol Syp. Welcome to Lubyanka Prison,' and he turned his palm out upon the bleak grey walls which enclosed us all about.

'Lubyanka Prison,' I repeated numbly. 'This is where I have come?'

'In some certain respects, Soviet technology maintains an inspiring leadership. Don't you think so? But come, you must be tired. Let me show you your room.'

2 AT HOME IN LUBYANKA

Of all those rooms in which poor luck had thrust me since leaving Albertville, I would not complain the most about my cell at Lubyanka Prison. It was a tiny room with a small window overlooking the very courtyard into which I had dropped, which window was not only closed off from the yard by a grille but by a mesh as well. My cot was narrow and over it was folded a bright red blanket. There was a small table and upon it a lamp which, as I felt about for its switch, I found contained a little device I decided was a microphone. And no sooner than seconds after I had discovered it, perhaps muttering to myself about it or handling its sensitive cage too roughly, did that man—now, I mean to call him only by the name Syp—come springing lithely into my cell.

'Two minutes and twelve seconds, Three,' said he to me. 'You found it in exactly two minutes and twelve seconds. Congratulations. You beat Beria himself by four seconds. Yes? Yes, I, congratulate you.'

'It was an accident,' I shook my head and glanced again at that lamp. 'The plate is loose. One cannot help noticing it.'

'No, no—yes?—I congratulate you,' he grinned at me. 'But we should have expected as much of *Gaspodin Tri*, yes? No?

Yes? Or would you have us believe you knew where to look for the—the *bug*, your Director would say; ah, when did you finally begin to work for that man?—you would know where to look for it before you ever came to this room? No, we doubt that even Mr. MacNail is fully this recondite.'

Again I looked at that lamp, wondering that he held it to be such an impenetrable concealment for a microphone. But I said nothing.

'Well,' M. Syp here rubbed his hands together, 'I bring you the greetings of *our* Director, Three. I bring you the greetings of Comrade Bulsht himself. Take note, Three: for he wishes you to visit him today. Yes? Yes?'

I sat at the edge of the bed. 'Bulsht . . . yes; I have heard that name.'

'Oh, I think you have,' laughed M. Syp. 'I have no doubt of it, yes? Yes, I imagine MacNail might have referred to Comrade Bulsht on occasion, and jealously. But Three, do you hear what I tell you? Listen again: Comrade Bulsht will see you *himself*. In person. Yes? No? Do you quite follow me? You still stand before his . . . his *body*.'

I sat weary and found it hard to think. 'He is dead?'

M. Syp instantly put his hand over his mouth as if he, himself, had spoken the morbid word. He frowned and pointed at the lamp. He shook his head sharply.

'Well,' I said, sighing, 'it is good that I will see him today. For the sooner I see him, the sooner I may try to explain my case to him.'

'Wonderful, wonderful! That is just what he wishes you to do. Have you rested, Three?'

'Rested, Sir?' I looked up. 'Well, you see, I have been alone only these two minutes and twelve seconds,' I smiled at him but he seemed with labouring eyes unable to construct a path into my meaning. 'I have hardly had time even to inspect my cell.'

'And do you like it? Yes? Yes?'

'The cell? Why, Sir,' I looked around to complete my inspection as quickly as I could, but it did not help me to frame an answer, 'as cells go . . .'

'Would you like the blanket changed?' He stepped to the bed and was so solicitous of me as to feel at that blanket, perhaps suspecting it was not heavy enough. 'Another shade? Crimson? Vermilion? No? Pink? Ruby?'

I shrugged, not understanding these values.

M. Syp looked about my cell now, as if in search of some other service he might offer me. 'Ah, and when you wish water,' he put his hands together and again rubbed them, as if to press water from them, 'you have only to call.'

'Call?'

'Just call,' he smiled, and nodded towards that lamp.

'Ah, I see. And for a toilet?'

'The same procedure will answer for every need here at Lub-yanka.'

'I see. Thank you.'

'And are you hungry? Better no? Would you like coffee?'

'Coffee?'

'Well, then, you could use coffee and a rest. Yes? Am I correct?'

'Well,' I smiled and shook my head, a bit surprised. 'I thank you.'

'I will have toast and coffee sent in. It will please you? And jam? What do you prefer? Jelly?'

'I may choose?'

'Why not? Insofar as we can provide.'

'You are kind,' and I took cheer, for a small taste of something I favoured would be dear to me now, I thought it might even give me strength. 'If you should have blueberry jam? I have a fondness for that.'

'Blueberry jam!' M. Syp said in what at first sounded an unnecessarily loud voice. But then I realized he had just ordered my coffee, toast and blueberry jam. 'Well and good,' said he then, in a more moderate tone, 'and now, what else may I do for you?'

'No, you are kind,' I stood from the bed, unable to tell whether I was more comfortable on my feet or seated. 'Only to eat and rest for a while, for my exhaustion is end to end. And then to explain my situation.'

As you wish. Now,' M. Syp glanced calculatingly at his wristwatch, 'you shall have four minutes to eat and six to rest. Ten in all. It will do? Yes? And then, in just ten minutes, out you will waltz through that door,' and M. Syp contorted his body about gracefully as if practising at the waltz, 'and through a hall and up the stairs and down the hall and through the door and, my oh my, Three, you shall be in *his* office. The very office. And you in the country not yet a day. Envious, yes? Yes? Better yes?'

I thought that four minutes to eat and six to rest were too scant and said, 'If I might have just an hour or so. You see, I had no sleep at all last night, and—'

I cannot describe how swiftly that man's mood changed. He had been twisted about, gazing intently at the door, but now he swung back as if to pounce upon me, his hands clenched into fists at his sides. 'Don't upset me!' he roared and his eyes took fire, his shoulders shook viciously. 'You did not sleep last night? No, but you proceeded to the Soviet Union last night on a mission every bit as deceitful as those which frequently take me to New York, yes? Yes? I *know* about deceit, Mr. Three, and I despise it. You didn't sleep? Ah, but I slept little, myself. I happen to have insomnia, Three; and do you care about that? Have you wondered about me? Have you stopped one moment this morning—one moment!—to consider *me*? Yes? No? Perhaps not! But I should worry for *you*. Well, however, I do not *mean* to be exploited by you,' and his voice was so dressed with loathing that, was such a heat addressed to an egg, he might have baked it. He suddenly yelled, '*Marmalade!*'

'Marmalade?' I asked, bewildered.

'Yes, marmalade! You'll soon enough learn that Lubyanka wasn't built for your pleasure alone, Three.'

'Ah, I see,' and I glanced perhaps dolefully, but more wisely, at that lamp.

And soon M. Syp's mood changed again, he ran a stringy set of fingers through his blond hair and over his face and forced himself to smile. 'Forgive me for lifting my voice. *Forgive me, Comrades*. After all, we want you to be happy here. No?

Please, you co-operate with us and we will be quick to respond. Rest for eight minutes, Three. Eat quickly and stretch it to nine. It is now seven-fifty-six. In twelve minutes, then, and at exactly eight-eight, Comrade Bulsht will receive you and make you forget your exhaustion,' and ridding himself of the uncomfortable smile, he nodded curtly to me, turned and walked quickly from my cell, locking the door after him.

Moments later, I was served coffee, toast and marmalade by a stocky friendly-faced man in a grey jacket, who entered, set down his tray and left without either a word or a glance for me.

3 MR THREE

I could not eat. I sipped at the coffee. It seemed not even a minute had passed when that same M. Syt returned for me.

'You are ready?' he asked as amiably as though he had not lost his temper.

'Can it be time already?'

He looked at his watch. 'It is eight-six, yes?'

'Well,' I could not help smiling as I stood, 'I lost my two minutes.'

'I think you did not,' he said, smiling as I followed him into the hall. 'I merely revised them. Revision is better than subversion, yes? And keeping Comrade Bulsht waiting happens to be treason. You might say I saved your life.'

The road to M. Bulsht's office was marked by nothing spectacular except, perhaps, for my question about M. Gibber, for I wondered what had become of him.

'Yes,' said M. Syt. 'Unfortunately for him, we discovered he was a counter-counter agent.'

'You mean he was one of *your* men?'

'I mean he was *not* one of our men. Did you know him well, Three?'

'Not at all,' I shook my head.

'Good. I am glad.'

The office of M. Bulsht was surely different from the office

of the pigmy in New York. Here, everything was indeed on the grand scale; yes, the room was brilliantly, richly, appointed. The carpet was thick and a musty red, the curtains nearly as thick and nearly as red, and the wall paper had a red leaf design. The furnishings were large and looked to be of the greatest comfort, and from the ceiling was depended a great glittering chandelier, fairly as bright and star-infested as the sky itself during my night up in it.

We had to stand for a time at the doors to this spacious room, since M. Bulsht appeared to be busy at several things. I could see that the man was huge, or at least that his head was huge, a great bulbous squash of a head, a giant cabbage, except that, and most markedly unlike the head upon that pigmy who had sent me here, this cabbage had no leaves, no wrinkles, no marks of any kind. From where I stood I could not tell even if this head had features. My blood rose into my head; slowly, with anxiety, and not with anger.

I watched as the head leaned over the large, fine, polished desk, writing at some paper even as he interviewed a thin elderly lady who stood bent and squinting before the desk; and beside her stood a man who seemed an official whose task it perhaps was to keep the thin old lady from turning and battling her way out of Lubyanka Prison.

'Yes, yes, I see you,' said M. Bulsht, his words being translated even as he spoke by my companion, M. Syp, who seemed to take pride in the procedures. 'You, woman, why do your nostrils dilate? I think you are afraid. I think there is a reason. Guilty.' He looked down and began to write again 'Hang her. Of what is she accused?'

The official beside that old woman said, 'She is accused of being the mother of the spy, Mr. Three.'

M. Bulsht looked up and now he laid his pen down. He gave that old woman a long and hard examination. He nodded. 'It is a serious offence. Assisting an agent of a foreign power into the country, and through the one channel we cannot always watch: the uterine. So this is her.' Once more he nodded and, from where I stood and as best I could determine from his bland face, he seemed sad. 'Sit down, hag.'

That woman kept one hand beside her ear as if to snatch the sounds directed at her and reflect them into her head, and soon she was helped to become seated in one of the high arm-chairs at M. Bulsht's desk.

'Hag,' M. Bulsht told her, 'you will be shot.'

She waited a moment, as if needing that time to catch his words, and then, 'Oh God no,' she pleaded, choking.

'No?'

'I am innocent.'

'Why, you? Why you, hag? If anyone is innocent, I am innocent.' Here he lowered that ponderous huge head sombrely, 'and I am not innocent.' He chuckled deeply and darkly, but it lasted the fraction of a second and then he was sombre again. 'Hag, you are Minsk meat, Pinsk porridge, ay ay ay, the delicacies you are about to produce! Talk.'

'What is it? Of what can I be accused?'

'You are the mother of the spy, Three.'

'Whose mother?'

'Three's mother, hag. Three's mother.'

'No, no, God, no,' and she cried tearfully. 'I was never even married.'

'All the worse,' M. Bulsht moralized, and he began to study a document which the official beside the woman handed across to him. 'Well,' he said after a minute, 'according to this, you speak the truth. Not married. Ay ay ay, it's disgusting. Ah, I see . . . you were reported to have been standing beside Three.'

'Beside what?' She leaned towards him, her hand cupped about her ear.

'It was reported. You had a look of uncertain love in your eyes. This is how it was described. Perhaps it was not the best of descriptions, but my men are not poets. Who is to say? Perhaps it is a good description. Do you love your black son uncertainly?'

'Please, I cannot hear. I cannot understand,' she strained, putting her head and ear still nearer that splendid mahogany desk of M. Bulsht.

'If you will confess, life will be good for you,' said M. Bulsht

more loudly. 'You hear me, hag? We are not without pity here. We are human. You are human and we are human. You have only to tell us where your son is. Then you will be Queen of the Ball, Queen of the May,' and M. Bulsht sat back, his hands holding to the desk, and from his throat and head there did issue such a deep, bulging, throbbing laughter that even the desk trembled; and the old woman kept cupping her ear towards him, staring askance, as if having to strain even to hear his laughter. M. Bulsht stopped laughing. 'Comrade Hag, you were seen standing beside a man reported by a respectable Soviet citizen as foul. According to a statement I am just writing, Mr. Three is foul. You want to beg off with coincidence, yes? No. Where is that man?'

The old woman kept listening and seemed surprised that M. Bulsht had stopped speaking. She shook her head. 'What is it?'

M. Bulsht took up his pen and looked back to his papers. 'Hang her,' he muttered.

As the old woman was hurried out of the room, I was myself guided by M. Syp to the place at that desk she had vacated. M. Syp stood silently until he noticed a certain moistness gleaming upon one of the pink and prosperous cheeks of that mountainous head, which he pointed out to me before saying, with a voice which seemed to have caught against something jagged in his throat:

'Oh, Comrade Director, don't weep. She was only a hag. Not even a good hag,' this commiseration he translating for me directly and deftly; and his labour at translations is baffling since, after all, both of these men and myself could have spoken in English together.

M. Bulsht looked up at us with all the face he had, but it was a face without lines of smiling and without lines of frowning, without lines at all, and was all over it a common pink in colour, and though I could see his small eyes well enough, I could not determine their colour; for the purpose of description, I shall say they were translucent or else white, and for the purpose of an image, I shall say this sizeable man came as close as may a man to having no face at all.

'Her hair,' said M. Bulsht to M. Syp, 'her old, crinkly, grey

hair,' and he wiped a hand across that moist cheek. 'The very colour my beloved sister's hair turned the day I condemned her husband, Pyotr.'

'But you *had* to condemn the barbarian, Comrade Director,' M. Syp rushed to the defence of the head. 'Didn't he inform on your father and your two brothers?'

'Exactly,' nodded the head. 'Never did he suspect that he would stand to Papa's left that bleak morning. I put my sister to the wall the next week; I find intolerable around the house a moping woman.'

'Therefore,' smiled M. Syp, 'weep no more, gentle Comrade Director, for I cannot bear it.'

'I'm not weeping, you fool,' the head growled, 'I'm drinking,' and he took up from a table behind him a glass and with it a bottle of what was surely vodka, and poured himself a glassful of that hot liquid, and he drank of it, and wiped his mouth, leaving one cheek freshly moist, and at last returned his attention to his papers, seeming to forget all about the presence of M. Syp and myself.

As we waited, another man came striding into the office and he stopped only when he reached M. Bulsht's desk, saying:

'Comrade Director, I am back.'

'Yes, yes, Dyenyu, I hear you.' M. Bulsht wrote slowly upon a paper. 'You went where I told you to go, Comrade?'

'I did,' announced that Comrade Dyenyu.

'You saw whom I told you to see?'

'I did,' answered Comrade Dyenyu.

'He told you what I told you he would tell you?'

'He did, Comrade Director. He told me your father and brothers were as guilty as you are.'

'Not that, not *that*! I mean about Mr. Three. He told you of Three's activities in Odessa?'

'Of that, he knew nothing, Comrade Director. That is what he told me.'

'And you told him he *had* heard of Three?'

'Of course, Comrade Director.'

'And he denied this.' M. Bulsht set his pen down again, to look up. 'And what did you do?'

'There are no contradictions in Soviet life.'

M. Bulsht nodded.

'And, of course,' Comrade Dyenyu added, 'you are Soviet life.'

'Let me not deny it. However, you've left something out, my dear Comrade.'

Comrade Dyenyu stared at the glass of vodka in M. Bulsht's hand. 'But what can it be?'

'Would you call your mission a success, then, Comrade Dyenyu?'

'Why, Comrade Director,' and Comrade Dyenyu now stood on his tiptoes and looked at the floor, his hands behind his back, smiling wanly, 'as to that, let me not be so bold as to suggest it was a *global* success,' but here the poor traitor stopped, for M. Bulsht had pressed a button, which very modest act brought three tall and muscular men, male nurses perhaps, advancing into the room, each of whom took hold of this or that part of Comrade Dyenyu's anatomy, and in some inconsiderable fraction of a moment he and they had vanished.

To his translation of the foregoing, M. Syp made the footnote: 'There are no failures in Soviet life.'

'It is true,' said M. Bulsht in English. He looked at us and said, 'Tell me how this reads, Comrade; translate it for your friend. Ah, I take note that you are black, Comrade Prisoner. But that is no excuse. Read, Dzhiludakgorlaglasnahsmarksert-sczapornaryfopukhalbassonitsavaspalineyemlyokhkhkehkhvetra-nahyaosparbryushnoitifazhoksudaragaobmarakshtozdelatshto-byutikhlabol-sha, read!'

'Why,' M. Syp smiled broadly, 'it is the local news from tomorrow morning's edition of *Narody Achky*,' and M. Syp then read and translated the following:

A spy stalks your streets, Comrade Citizens. That spy is the infamous Three! Inform on him. Keep alert and watch for this sneak-in-the-night, this pernicious bandit provocateur. He is black, but that is no excuse. In past years, six Soviet men of science (one a Hero) have made the deformed mentality of opportunist Three a gift of many important Soviet secrets in

the fields of rocketry, the dial telephone and deodorants. These were far from being heroic Soviet citizens. Do not be far from being heroic Soviet citizens. Recognize Three for what he is (a capitalist desperado agitator imperialist provocateur trouble-making money-grubbing bandit spoiler agent of the American Secret Enemy Agency.) He will approach you and offer you stolen worker-exploited dollars (currently: '90 to the ruble) in return for access to vital Soviet information. There is no clear description of the thug, Three, except that he is doubtless foul. Also, he is black, but that is no excuse. (Most black men are good.) Be suspicious of your neighbours. Particularly, be suspicious of your foul neighbours. Inspired by the loving guidance of whoever rules your own dear Soviet, be well-behaved Soviet citizens, and watch the harvests increase. There is more news on the other side.

M. Syp, as he ended this reading, continued for a little to gaze upon what he had read with a smile I say was pathetic, and he finally set the article upon M. Bulsht's desk and took a handkerchief from his pocket, touched his eye with it, blew his nose and, tucking the handkerchief away again, he nodded his pathetic smile at the enormous head.

'Especially,' said the head, *'this sneak-in-the-night'*; I thought that good.'

M. Syp gave it another nod and shook his head and muttered, 'Those unutterable Swedes. A man like this sits labouring daily until his sweat is all over our news. I tell you, our news runs with his sweat! Here,' he snatched up the article and shoved it at my face, 'smell this!'

'Slowly, Comrade, go slowly,' the head now had a big chubby hand beside it, cautioning M. Syp. 'This does not sound pretty to me, I do not like it.'

M. Syp bit his tongue openly, set the article down, then amended his words: 'He is the greatest realist since Gorki,' and he glanced as if for verification at the head before continuing, 'and we are expected, Mr. Three, to sit up and grin and humbly pat our hands together before a gesture made by foreigners to an enemy of Soviet life right in our midst, yes?'

Yes? No? As if we, of all people, could not tell which is the art created by the tail of an ass! We *know* what that end of an ass looks like, Three, and we know what to expect from it. Yes? Yes? Ah, I tell you, Mr. Three, there are no neutrals. There is left and there is right, and we are left.'

'No emotions, Comrade, please,' grunted M. Bulsht then. 'A few well chosen words supported by decorous use of force is enough, and more becoming. So, then: this is Mr. Three.'

'No, no!' I spoke up now, 'for I thought you understood that surely. Why, you just interviewed a woman said to be the mother of M. Three; yes, and you spoke with that man who questioned people about the activities of M. Three, seeking to locate him; and here there is the article upon your desk. Since you are searching for M. Three, how is it you can suggest I am he?'

'Vigilance,' replied M. Bulsht, and he let that word suffice alone for some while. 'For one thing,' he at last went on, 'we naturally keep our news two or three days behind events. This gives us freedom not only in creating happy Soviet endings, but also the freedom to revise recalcitrant endings. Yes, and it gives us the freedom of being positive as the news happens, as well as the freedom of amputating the useless. Some days, in times as tense as these, we keep ourselves a full week behind, and more, and we are quite content that way, for here we have the freedom of contentment. On top of these add the freedom of history and a jot of poetic licence, and you will understand that your duplicity has led you to a free country, Three.'

'As a matter of fact,' M. Bulsht went on, 'this particular news I think is a bit late. I ought to have got it into yesterday's edition, I suppose, but there was no space for it; the entire edition was devoted to the death of Trotsky. And then, we only learned two days ago that you were destined for Moscow once again, and that you would for a fact be travelling under the auspices of SEA. As it is, tomorrow morning the people will be looking for you. They will eagerly anticipate your capture. Do you think we would be so irresponsible as to exercise our freedom of beginning a story if we could not happily end it?'

'But that woman,' I said, 'you surely accused her of being the

mother of M. Three, and yet you believe I am he. She is not my mother.'

'Then you *are* Three?' M. Bulsht moved a slow half-circle in his chair, facing me.

'No, of course not.'

'You insist, however, that the woman was not Three's mother.'

'Of course not; of course she is not. But that is not what I said.'

'What did you say, Three?'

'I never saw her before.'

'And yet you know enough about her to say whose mother she is not; oh, don't work it to death, Three,' M. Bulsht turned the slow half-circle back again and put his fat hands together and looked down on them. 'Believe me, the answers we wish of you we can pull from you. Like teeth. Therefore, I don't care what you say or pull from yourself. In truth, Three, I would not much care even if you were *not* Three.'

'I am not!'

M. Bulsht chuckled another of his deep quick chuckles. 'And do you see that I do not care?'

'You believe me, then?'

'No. I do not. But I cannot care. Who would you say you are, however?'

'I will tell you. It will do no good, but I will tell you: I am Pernin Adumbaba.' I drew myself up from the chair now, and stood erectly before the enormous head. 'I am Premier of Badosh.'

The head laughed, again he laughed as before, an ocean-surfing kind of laughter, and while the surf pounded he reached behind for more vodka, pouring himself another full glass of it. M. Syp laughed with him, but politely, it seemed, as if he did not understand quite thoroughly at what he laughed.

'Ay ay ay, it is funny,' M. Bulsht drank and set his glass down hard, placing his palm over his mouth, then dropping it. 'You choose the dead leader of a dead nation. How far behind do you keep *your* newspapers? No, Three, I am not impressed.'

'I am Adumbaba, curse you!' I declared. I was surely despairing of making any man believe it, and half suspected I was saying so now only to try to make myself continue to believe it.

'Adumbaba, Premier of Badosh, yes?' nodded the head. 'However, there is no Adumbaba. He was murdered. There is no Badosh. Badosh died.'

'What do you say?'

'Who writes the newspapers in Albertville, Premier?' asked the head, grinning.

'He needs lessons from our own sweaty Comrade Director Bulsht,' smiled M. Syp.

'Silence!' M. Bulsht dropped his fist down on to the desk and the glass of vodka spilled over and so angry was he that he swept both the running liquid and the glass from his desk. 'Silence when I am talking. If you cannot hear, Comrade, you perhaps have no use for your ears. Do you so soon forget the lesson of Comrade Popov?'

'Oh,' hastily replied that M. Syp, 'by the Great Father Steal, Stealing, Stolen, I do, yes? Yes? Yes. He had no use for his eyes. I carry that tender lesson now and to my grave, Comrade Director.'

'Yes, exactly,' said the head, and I would not wait but intruded:

'What is it you say?'

M. Bulsht glared at me until his eyes nearly took pigmentation. 'Be soft with your voice, you. I do not esteem ungentlemanly behaviour at my desk. As for your Badosh, Three, if you followed the news as closely as you follow *money*,' and with what a deprecating sneer did he utter the word *money*, 'you would know that Badosh is no more than a used battleground today. Your Adumbaba is dead. His chief aide is dead. The capitalist lackey, Tebrou, is Prime Minister in Albertville, and make no mistake, Three: Badoshian Peoples' Hero Vusupu didn't take that appointment lying down, for that wasn't on our blueprints, I guarantee you. No, he seceded and fought and already has declared the independence of the East Badoshian Peoples' Republic. It is at midnight tonight, their

time, that the truce will be signed by Tebrou and Vusupu; and so you can see there is now East Badosh and West Badosh, my dear Premier, with a few acres at the South only left for the haggling between Peking and the United Nations. Now, if by some curious and irksome bit of chance, you are—or believe you are—the very dead Pernin Adumbaba, I can simply repeat to you what I have already told you: I do not care. You are Three. No other story you can tell will excite me. You are Three, and about this I care. Yes, and I care about it for far different reasons than M. M. MacNail cares about you, Three, for I am not merely an opportunist, but a strategist as well. Your former Director counts victories one by one, as he counts gold in a sack. I do not count gold. I count hours and days. When I do not like some days, I remove them. They are not in our books. When I envisage a day as being useful to us, I beckon to it. I do not buy it, I magnetize it. It comes. Do you understand me, Three?’

All of those words I heard clearly, yes, as I might have clearly heard a wind or music or anything else which came ringing down upon my hollowing being just then, but they were empty. It was all over in Badosh. The feeling of surrender within me which I first felt in New York City returned now, but pressed me still more deeply into the dark unintelligent earth of witlessness. Badosh lay mutilated. Badosh was still. Lumla, still; the people, still. Adumbaba, still. Africa, still. Stillness; and for tomorrow, decay. And the world, a horse that other men ride, reared recklessly and kicked at my heart, for I did feel it. Lumla, goodbye. Badosh, goodbye. Adumbaba, stop living: you are dead, as they say. My heart pinched at my voice: ‘This is true?’

‘Do not interrupt me,’ said M. Bulsht. ‘I am thinking. True? Why do you ask if it is true? Did I not say it is so? There are no lies in Soviet life, Three. You will learn it. Let us talk no more of history, but of the future, of what I wish to do with you and for you. To M. M. MacNail, you were an individual, and he wished the distinction of your individual defection from the cause of Africa to the cause of his banks. He wished to avail himself of your services. Your *services*. Ay ay, he disgusts

me; even admitting he is a man to be reckoned with, he disgusts me. I, Three, I do not wish you to defect from Africa, but rather to lead us there. To me, you are not Three; you are Black Magic. Do you understand? Black Magic has an apartment in Moscow, he is among friends and the friends of the African peoples. Yes, and it is a comfortable apartment; it is luxurious by Soviet standards, and if it falls down, we will give you another equally luxurious. What colour of wallpaper do you prefer, Three? All we ask of you is friendship; nothing more. Let us love you, and try to love us a little. Oh, there may be an occasional goodwill trip, Comrade Three, but these will not be work so much as pleasure. You see how little we need of you?’

I was shaking inside. My stomach shook, my shoulders and arms shook. It was not from fear. I felt something going out of me, something stronger and more dear to me than life itself: I cannot define it. But it was leaving me. I said to that man, weakly and yet with resolve:

‘I tell you now what I have told no one else. M. Three is dead. Black Magic is dead. Yes, I, myself, I saw him die.’

This M. Bulsht found more inspiration for laughter, his pink face becoming mottled and veined. ‘Do not amuse me more, Three,’ said the head then. ‘I am not of the disposition which takes to more than one joke or so in the morning. Indeed, I had my fill of it with the hag. Do not tell me who lives or who dies. Do not tell me any more who you are or who you are not. Let us not be unpositive. Let us be certain: you are Three. You have come from MacNail. You went to New York from Africa as Three, and as Three moved from New York to Moscow. What more do I need to know? Black Magic, you are here. We have begun a story in tomorrow morning’s edition of *Narody Achky*. The story is begun well and will end well, within a day or two; so has it always been, so shall it always be. Do you think that your private interests or ambitions can alter a tradition of such dimensions in a State of such dimensions with schemes of such dimensions as ours? What arrogance! Three, the next edition may read that Black Magic flew

to Moscow only to give himself to our humane and revolutionary cause, to join hands with the great peoples' movements all over the world. This will mean much to us in Africa. The next edition may also read that the spy-terrorist, Mr. Three, flew to Moscow in an American aircraft from an American base, and that this aircraft was brought down with a rocket forged by the hands of Soviet workers, and that the traitor to all African peoples, Mr. Three, was himself killed. A worker soldier will get a medal; yes, we might even have him shoot down an aircraft to earn it. No, I think you cannot alter our traditions, our plans or our future, Three. There is, in fact, only one thing in all the world that you can alter.

'You can alter nothing except the future of that old lady, who maintains her innocence while we maintain her guilt. That hag, Three, is she in fact not your mother? Have we in fact erred and humiliated that gallant lonely old woman? Must we let her live? Is she, then, not your mother?'

I gaped at that head.

'Three! Do you hear me?'

I nodded. 'I hear you.'

'And she is not your mother?'

I moved my head to say she was not.

'You say we have erred? You say she is not your mother, Comrade Three? To this you will swear?'

Again I shook my head. 'She is not my mother.'

'To say she is not is to name yourself.'

'To name myself?'

'And you identify yourself?'

'You ask who I am?'

'Identify yourself!'

So, then; I saw how it was. And I said, 'I am Mr. Three.'



WILLIAM BUTLER was born in the U.S.A. in 1919. His American schooling dissatisfied him, and he left High School before completing the syllabus. At first, he intended to make a career as a musical composer, and subsequently he worked with a radio station of which he became production director and head of literary programmes. He became increasingly interested in writing and his short stories appeared in many magazines. William Butler's first novel, *The Experiment*, was published in 1949 and this was followed a year later by *The Butterfly Revolution*. His widely-acclaimed third novel, *The House at Akiya*, is set in Japan where he now lives with his wife and small son. Part of *Mr Three* was conceived when William Butler made a journey from Moscow, through Siberia, to the east coast of Russia. He has been awarded the American Saxton Fellowship for the Japanese historical novel on which he is currently working.